Support Teachers' Awareness and Adaptability in Classroom Management Using the Sensory Circuit Program to Cope With Special Needs Student's Behavior

Clarissa Karina Ruus¹, Marlin Marpaung²
¹,²Univsitas Pelita Harapan, Indonesia
E-mail: missclars24@gmail.com

Article Info

This research aims to analyze and describe: (1) the awareness of the support teachers on the sensory circuit program, and (2) the adaptability of support teachers in using the sensory circuit program as a model of classroom management to cope with behavioral problems of special needs students at XYZ School South Kembangan. The research used ten indicators, fourteen questions, and five informants with an evaluation study approach. The data validity is obtained using triangulation techniques, informants' analysis, and comparing relevant theories related and previous research. Analysis of the interview result consists of nine related quotations of awareness and twenty related quotations of adaptability showed that four out of five support teachers' levels of awareness and adaptability are increasing. The result also found the influenced factors of the teachers' awareness and adaptability level which included (1) consistency of hands-on practice, (2) students' background needs, and (3) good teamwork.

I. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of educational practices for all children is a mandate brought by 1945 Indonesia's Constitution, listed in articles 31 paragraphs 1 and 2. The mandate states that every citizen has the right to education and that every citizen is obliged to attend basic education and the government is obliged to take care of its financial needs. The paragraph also explains that every child who is registered as an Indonesian citizen has the right and obligation to carry out their education. In this context, each child referred to in this verse also includes children who have a special background or what is commonly called children with special needs (Sukadari 2019: 39).

Inclusive education is an educational practice that includes special needs students getting the same teachings and treatment as students without special needs in the classroom (Widya and Rifma 2020: 96). In this inclusive practice, special needs students are not only included as non-active learning participants, namely being present to only see the learning process but children with special needs are invited to be involved in the learning process, as well as interact with teachers and friends in the classroom.

This inclusion practice is also in line with the circular letter of Director of Majelis Pendidikan Dasar and Menengah no. 2 380 of 2003 which reads, "Inclusive education is education that includes children who have special needs to learn together with other normal children". There are several things that schools need to pay attention to and prepare to create an inclusive learning
environment ranging from teaching staff to facilities that support inclusive services (Sukadari 2019: 77).

XYZ School is a school that runs inclusion education. The school began its operation in 2019 and now has five children with special needs consisting of autism, Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), speech delay, and hearing impairment. In supporting the implementation of inclusive education, the school not only accepts these students, but the school also ensures the well-being and development of every aspect by providing and facilitating them with support programs from supporting teachers, and support rooms devoted to students who have learning difficulties and special needs.

In addition, to further equip the needs of special needs students and create an increasingly inclusive learning environment, in September 2021 the school opened a program called the sensory circuit. This program is a series of physical activities that aim to train the focus on special needs or learning difficulties students, as well as correct behavioral problems. This program requires the important role of support teachers, where they need to master each series of activities and benefits and be able to determine the physical activity that suits the needs of these students (Horwood 2009: 51).

Referring to the government through Peraturan Pemerintah no 19 of 2005 concerning the National Standard of Education article 4 paragraph 1 states that every educational unit that carries out inclusive education must have education personnel who have the competence to organize learning for students with special needs (Praptiningrum 2010, 35).

On the contrary, if the school parties are not aware of this program, they will continually misunderstand and misinterpret the sensory as problematic behavior. However, if all the school parties understand the needs of each student, it will enable these children to attend and maintain focus (Aspy and Grossman 2007; Murray et al. 2009).

Some of these obstacles are (1) the sensory circuit program is a new program in the school, purposely to support special needs students and difficult learners, and was first launched in September 2021; (2) Due to the COVID-19 situation, the support teachers had the first training in the sensory circuit program virtually, which made it impossible for the teachers to try the sensory activities in person; (3) The support teachers’ first try at the sensory circuit program was done together with special needs students, so some of the teachers were not aware of the sensory activities, or its equipment, and struggled to adapt to all the 3-sections at once; (4) The sudden changes of COVID-19 forced the school to continue shifting from online to onsite and have made the support teacher struggle to manage the class as they need to think of the best ways in maintaining special needs students’ engagement and interest in learning; (5) As the shifting continues from online to onsite, the teachers had less time to consistently practice the sensory circuit program, and it eventually made the teachers feel unaware of the program.

Based on the problems above, the objectives of this research are expected to analyze and describe the support teachers’ awareness of the sensory circuit program and its impact; the support teachers’ adaptability in using the sensory circuit, and the involvement of the sensory circuit program in improving support teachers’ awareness and adaptability.

II. METHOD

As this research aims to analyze in-depth an evaluation study that occurred in XYZ school, the researcher chose the qualitative approach as the best method for carrying out the research. The evaluation study in this research is carried out to evaluate a sensory circuit program in XYZ school. The evaluation program in this case is a process to find out whether the purpose of a program has been implemented (Tyler in Wirawan 2011: 37). To obtain valuable data in this study, researcher gathered a total of five teachers who were willing and listed under the learning support department. The five teachers consisted of one teacher who handles students with learning difficulties and assists special needs students, and four teachers who each handle students with special needs such as autism, Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity (ADHD), speech delay, and hearing impairment. The teachers consist of two who have implemented sensory circuits in their previous schools, while the rest are non-experienced.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

The sensory circuit program in XYZ school has been implemented since September 2021. This program is carried out every day before the teaching and learning activities begin and during the learning process. The benchmark of all the activities on the program was adapted from Horwood’s sensory motor skills
programme for children (2019). Each student will go through 3-sections of physical activities such as alerting, organizing, and calming. These activities will help the special needs students to get ready before joining the class.

Based on the focus of the research, the exposure of the result is divided into three parts, they are (1) support teachers' awareness of the use of sensory circuit program and its impact on their classroom management for special needs students' behavior problems and consists of these following dimensions: characteristics and behavior of special needs students, misbehavior control, and sensory circuit program. (2) Support teachers' adaptability to the use of sensory circuit program in coping with special needs students' behavior problem classroom management. This element consists of managing behavior, implement new method or improvised treatment, sensory circuit program, and work in team. Lastly, (3) the involvement of sensory circuit program in improving support teachers' awareness and adaptability.

Following the data collection techniques, researcher interviewed each participant twice through the initial and final interview. Both of these interviews were conducted to analyze whether or not increasing support teachers' awareness and adaptability to sensory circuit programs is one of the classroom management in coping with behavioral problems of students with special needs.

B. Discussion

1. Support Teachers' Awareness of the Use of Sensory Circuit Program and its Impact on Their Classroom Management for Special Needs Students' Behavior Problems

   a) Characteristics and Behavior of Special Needs Students

   Based on the Theory of Mind (ToM) in chapter II described by Gallaher and Frith (2003, 3), awareness is not only related to developmental processes that not only build a deep understanding concept about oneself and the surrounding environment, but awareness also allow a person to predict others' behavior. In this case, teachers must be well-informed and understand their students' needs as well as their behavior or specific background. To answer the arises question, the data findings showed that all teachers understand their students' needs. One teacher explained her ADHD student has symptoms of lack of focus and eye-contact, zone out, body-rocking, and very limited of self-control. The student sometimes screams and mumbles in the class.

   In line with the Theory of Mind (ToM) regarding awareness, the explanation of the teacher above meets the criteria of someone who has awareness. The criteria based on this theory are (1) a deep understanding concept of oneself; (2) the surrounding environment; (3) being able to predict others' behavior. Teacher SR is able to clearly explain the characteristics of her student's behavior which means that this teacher has a deep understanding of oneself or her student. Moreover, other teachers also explain the background of their students clearly and completely with certain looks on their faces during the interview, so from here it can be concluded that the five teachers have good awareness in understanding the characteristics and behavior of students with needs in particular.

   b) Misbehavior Control

   Having self-awareness with a good understanding is needed to determine proper and correct treatment in coping with special needs students. If the treatment is effective, then the teacher can control the misbehaving and direct them on how to behave well in the classroom. Students with special needs such as autism and ADHD, cannot be equated with other non-special needs students because students like this need special treatment and cannot be combined with other students. One teacher explained her steps in controlling her autistic student's misbehavior such as giving reminders and applying a reinforcement system which includes briefing, scheduling, and making deals.

   In line with Yalcin and Erkal-Ilhan (2008), teachers who have awareness use effective teaching methods, based on their understanding of the students.
In this case, the NH teacher is known to understand his autistic students well, as she is able to determine and identify treatments that meet the needs of her student. Teacher CR did not only explain what treatments are done, but the strengths and weaknesses too. One example of self-assessment can be seen from the explanation as follows:

Quotation 3: "Rewards and consequences can hold her misbehavior, then 10-counts help her to stop what she's doing and back to focus. Sometimes this treatment can be very boring to her and only able to hold her focus for short period of time. After that, she will begin to do her own things again."

Self-assessment is needed to measure the extent to which the treatment can help and train students with special needs, but weakness also needs to be reviewed as a process of reflection and consideration to improve the treatment.

c) Sensory Circuit Program

In this discussion, researcher analyzed whether there is an addition or change in perspective and a new understanding of sensory circuit programs for the five support teachers. Increasing awareness needs to be measured so that the goal of implementing sensory circuit programs for students with special needs can be achieved. The sensory circuit program according to Horwood (2009: 28) allows students to have an optimum state of alertness and be ready for learning. In line with Horwood’s theory, the brief explanation from teacher L above confirms that this teacher understands the important purpose of the sensory circuit program whereas teacher RW explained her understanding of the sensory circuit program from a benefits perspective, instead of the purpose of the program.

There is an indication of increased awareness of teachers' understanding of the sensory circuit program after six months of implementation. The results of the analysis of the findings above show that there is an increase in teachers' awareness of sensory circuit programs. This increase in awareness is certainly influenced by people around such as the school's support in the implementation and fellow support teachers as they eventually affected the teacher's thinking of the program.

2. Support Teachers' Adaptability to the Use of Sensory Circuit Program in Coping with Special Needs Students' Behavior Problem Classroom Management

a) Managing Behavior

Zakaria (2018: 25) in her study mentioned that inclusive education provides an opportunity for special needs students to learn together with non-special needs students in a regular classroom setting. This combination of special needs and non-special needs students allows the emergence of problems related to behavior for students with special needs. Two out of five support teachers stated that the misbehavior of students with special needs is triggered by the circumstances in the classroom.

Teachers with good adaptability skills can respond to changes in the behavior of students with special needs and find solutions to control them. In this case, teacher RW and teacher SR showed their adaptability by making accommodations, which are providing personal break time and pull-out sessions. In line with Ambady et al. (2020, 424) on the study of accommodation stated that accommodations are designed to meet the academic requirement. Giving personal break time and pull-out sessions are not always associated with misbehaviors but are also related to students' academic abilities.

b) Implement New Method or Improvised Treatment

Holdhus (2016: 4) stated that improvisation is an intuitive, spontaneous, and responsive activity, sometimes to make the best of things when plans do not work out or something unforeseen happens. Improvisation for special needs students is likely to be a very important technique to adapt to the
unpredictable behavior caused by the students.

In the interview, the support teachers who handle students with hearing impairment and autism showed the intuitive, spontaneous, response and change of plans both teachers designed to maintain good behavior, as well as to prevent misbehavior. The statement “I need to keep modifying my treatment” from the teacher indicates a readiness to adapt fast when unpredictable things happen in the class. The analysis based on the explanation of the rest of the teachers and classroom observation also shows their flexibility in adapting to changes and improvising their treatment. These teachers understand each of the students very well so that they are able to adapt a variety of teaching methods according to the needs of their students.

c) Sensory Circuit Program

As this program has been implemented for several months, the teachers are expected to be able to adapt to the program well. This refers to both experienced and non-experienced teachers. The initial interview above confirmed that teacher L was well-informed about this program and able to adapt the three activities of sensory with her student. On the contrary, teacher RW did the sensory circuit in her own way without following the correct procedures, claiming that she looked at her student's condition first and modified the program to be regular physical activities. Teachers who have adapted sensory circuit programs describe some of the changes seen in their students. In the interview, teacher CR stated that the program helps her to fill out her special needs student's sensory needs and helps the student to calm and relax before entering the class.

From some of the explanations above, it can be concluded that sensory circuit programs have a positive influence on students with special needs considering their ready-to-learn attitude, independence, and state of emotionality after following the program for several months. Thus, an interesting thing is analyzed in the findings of this data that students with special needs who by evidence change in their attitudes are those who follow the sensory program consistently. To add to this finding, being consistent determines the effectiveness of a program. This finding is also similar to Francis et al. (2020: 10-11) study of consistency in child academic socialization. It mentioned that consistent monitoring, conversation, rules enforcement, and socialization affect the high level of achievement of students whereas inconsistent treatments have an impact on students' low level of achievement.

Aside from the above findings, a contrary finding that is similar to Francis et al. (2020, 10-11) related to inconsistent adaptability is shown by teacher RW. Based on the final interview and class documentary, the teacher's RW inconsistency in adapting the sensory circuit program to her student considering the student's background. Though there is no specific evidence if this inconsistency led to the low level of her student's achievement or at last changes in the student's behavior, still, the analysis of the adaptability of teacher RW seemed to be poor.

d) Work in Team

The final interview explained the five teachers held the sensory circuit program together. This practice helps the non-experienced ones understand how to implement the program appropriately. The evidence in this narrative shows there are no boundaries between fellow teachers, both experienced and non-experienced ones to join hands in conducting the sensory circuit programs. Support teachers have a sense of trust in each other, and a positive attitude that is willing to learn from fellow teachers, regardless of background experience or seniority.

The evident narrative reflected the indicators of cooperation working in a team from West (2012) such as (1) joint responsibility to complete work by sharing work; (2) contributing to each other by sharing energy and thoughts;
(3) mobilizing the abilities of each member to the maximum capacity. This conceptual view can be proven through the exposure of each teacher who explained the readiness and willingness of fellow teachers to deal with other students when other teachers are late or unable to come to school.

3. The Involvement of Sensory Circuit Program in Improving Support Teachers' Awareness and Adaptability

The sensory circuit program in XYZ school has been carried out since September 2020 with the aim of facilitating special needs students. This program is included in one of the supporting facilities for special needs students, as explained by Vaughn, Bos, and Schumn in Direktorat Pembinaan Sekolah Luar Biasa (2008: 6-10) in which the school has a class with pull-out and at certain times or situations are pulled out from the classroom to a specific classroom to get guidance services from a special guidance teacher. In its application, all teachers already have adequate awareness and adaptability in using the sensory circuit program as one of their classroom managements to cope with special needs students' behavioral problems.

From classroom observation, it is seen that two teachers understand the purpose of the program. They use the sensory circuit program in their pull-out session as an effective classroom management strategy to cope with special needs students' misbehavior. Respond to the variety of differences and changing needs of each student by adjusting their learning pace, adapting activities for different kinds of students, or finding more different teaching and learning resources to explain or illustrate the tasks better is one of the teacher's adaptability criteria written by Collie and Martin (2016: 30). In line with this criterion, both teacher RW and NH performed good adaptability in using the sensory circuit program. Not only implementing the program as it is but also adjusting the program to their student's needs such as applying the sensory circuit before the class starts and during the pull-out session.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A. Conclusion

Teachers’ awareness of the sensory circuit and its effect on classroom management of special needs students' behavior problems are fairly good. Increasing awareness can be seen from the results of the findings in the final interview. The participant teachers are able to explain the program very well and clearly, and consistent with the conceptual theory of the program by Horwood (2009). In addition to teachers’ adaptability in the use of sensory circuit programs as classroom management for students with special needs, it can be concluded that the adaptability of the five support teachers is relatively good. This statement is proven by the evidence of data findings on adaptability in managing behavior, implementing new methods or improvising treatment, the sensory circuit program, and working in a team.

The involvement of sensory circuit program in improving support teachers’ awareness and adaptability resulted in a positive relation between these two skills, as seen through classroom observation and during interview sessions. Thus, the conclusions on each dimension above indicate some of these important points: 1) consistent practice increases understanding that leads to awareness and adaptability; 2) factors in the surrounding environment affect a person’s level of awareness. In this case, the absence of increasing awareness of teacher RW is influenced by the surrounding environment which is the student’s background; 3) good teamwork develops teachers’ capacity to adapt well.

B. Suggestion

Based on the results of the study and the discussion of the results of the study, the researcher would like to address the following suggestions: The level of awareness and adaptability of support teachers needs to be evaluated periodically, so that the school can measure the effectiveness of this program, considering that the number of students with special needs has the possibility to increase every year:

Some things related to this periodic evaluation can be seen from several points of view:

1. This periodic evaluation is expected to be able to provide feedback on the achievement of teacher support in utilizing
this sensory facility that has been provided by the school.

2. Evaluation of support teachers' achievements may become a reference to whether training is periodically needed or not, as well as what sensory circuit program materials will meet the needs of the support teachers.

3. In addition to feedback on the achievement of support teachers in the utilization of this facility, the evaluation conducted by the school can provide feedback on the sensory equipment supply.

Furthermore, in the application of sensory circuit programs in schools, teachers' awareness and adaptability are not enough to succeed in the program. Other important aspects need to be considered such as the level of the school's community members' readiness such as regular teachers and staff. In an inclusive school setting, this program is expected not to be only supported by support teachers, but all the school community members. The next study may consider adding more sub-variables besides those mentioned above, as well as the number of participants.

REFERENCES


Galiana-Simal, Adrian, et al., 2020. Sensory Processing Disorder: Key Points of a Frequent Alteration in Neurodevelopmental Disorders. Cogent Medicine, 7(1736829), pp. 1-10.


