

THE USE OF SYMBOLS FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN IN THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain. The characteristic of autistic students is difficulty socializing with other people, lack of interest, limited activity, and frequent repetitive movements. Therefore, the importance of education for autistic children must begin since parents already know their child's condition. The objectives of this research are to: (1) identify the types of symbols used in teaching autism; and (2) examine the teacher's use of symbols to interact with autistic students. This research used the qualitative research method. This method is considered "reflective" which places the researcher in their role as a subject who also utilized observational techniques (direct observations and interviews). The sample employed in this study is purposeful and is based on how well the interviewees answered the questions. The findings of this research demonstrated the value of autism symbols. How one responds to inquiries and other actions might be perceived as developing. The types of symbols are modified to meet the communication needs of people with autism, such as PACS (Picture Archiving and Communication System), COMPIC (Computerized Pictograph), and pictures that are useful teaching tools for use in the classroom. The degree of cooperation and eye contact of autistic students must first come into the teacher's focus to determine the effectiveness of symbols in teaching. The use of symbols in teaching communication to children with autism is very effective. It is said to be very effective because autistic children can slowly communicate with the people around them even though it takes a very long time.

Keywords: Symbols; teaching communication; autistic children.

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INTRODUCTION

Children born in this world have their differences, in both face, skin, and other differences. No child wants to be born with a disability or a certain disorder, for example, a child with a communication disorder, behavior, or social relationships disorder. This disorder is found in children with autism. The characteristic of autistic students is difficulty socializing with other people, lack of interest, limited activity, and frequent repetitive movements. Autistics also have an attitude of not caring about their surroundings. Even in anger, they can hurt themselves, or the people around them. Therefore, the importance of education for extraordinary children must begin since parents already know their child's condition. This is because their social spirit and behavior can be awakened early. The most important thing in children's early education is the response and eye contact with children. These are very influential on the development of children, besides that children's emotions must also be controlled (Derung, 2017; Nouf, 2017; Prilla, 2021).

The emotions of children with autism communicated can be controlled by using verbal and non-verbal language. Verbal language is very influential on eye contact although sometimes it's not the best way to distract him. However, it is realized that autistic children are not hearing impaired (deaf) although we often hear that autistic children are deaf, resulting in a speech response without any

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feedback. Talking about communication means talking about language. Language according to the informant (the identity of the informant is the next discussion), the language used is a language that is easily understood by students. Language is a tool used to communicate with other people. Language can be a symbol of sound produced by human speech. According to Chair (2012, p.33) Language is a system, in the form of symbols, the form of sounds, is a tribe, meaningful, conventional, unique, universal, productive, varied, dynamic, human, and used as a tool for social interaction, and serves as the identity of the speaker. Without language, humans will not be able to communicate with other people.

One of the most important factors in communicating is how the delivery of the message can be understood by others. So, people must have good communication skills. People must have good language skills to make communication work well. Someone who has language skills will more easily convey messages or ideas to others, both orally and in writing. Spoken and written are included in the sign of the perspective of semiotics in linguistics. Semiotics is the science of signs and pictures or symbols shown by the teacher as a sign and process of communication between teachers and students. As long as humans are still breathing, the process of creating and managing signs will be used. Signs universally have meanings as symptoms, evidence, symbols, and identifiers, which become addresses or instructions. People who experience a fall incident will feel pain in the area of their body that is hit, and the response of their organs will be immediately felt when they recognize the signs. Society as a sign-taker. Humans who are aware of a sign that is around them will interpret it according to their life experiences, which are called cultural factors. Even humans are part of the sign (Peirce, 1966:76). Then, children with autism describe some of the signs they have. In other words, Autistic Spectrum Disorder is a sign.

This type of disorder is labelled by clinicians as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) by examining the latest epidemiological findings related to the prevalence and incidence of ASD. The finding is that more boys have ASD than girls and 50% of autistic individuals fail to develop verbal communication. Even among those who acquire the ability to speak, there is a significant lifetime of communication impairment. Autistic Disorder: also called 'classic' autism is the most prominent form of ASD among the general population and the most studied by both theorists and clinicians. According to the DSM-IV criteria for autistic disorder, an individual must exhibit six (or more) of the 12 behavioural characteristics for this particular diagnosis to be made and be classified as a type of autistic disorder.

In an important epidemiological study in monitoring the increase in ASD cases in recent years, Powel et al (2000) found that the incidence of classic childhood autism increased by 18% each year. Kaye et al (2001) found that the incidence of newly diagnosed autism was 7 times higher than usual. The Department of Development Services at the California Agency for Health and Human Services published a report: The population with autism increased from 4.85 to 9.37% of the state's total client population. The increase in autism was more than four times higher than in other diagnostic categories, including cerebral palsy, epilepsy, and mental retardation.

Some research has been conducted by researchers on children with autism including Lorentius and Teresia (2017). This research aims to investigate whether PECS can affect the expressive communication skills of children with autism spectrum. It was found that PECS can be a reference for improving receptive and expressive language skills. Nouf M. Alzrayer et al. (2017) conducted a study in the United States, aiming to explore the performance of autistic spectrum children in the ability to ask using Proloquo2Go. It was found that Proloquo2Go increased motivation so that children with autism spectrum could express their requests by asking for items and activities they liked during the intervention process. Prilla Ayu Larasari, et al (2021) found that the use of pictorial lotto media can improve expressive language skills in terms of pronouncing nouns, namely bag, book, pencil, table, and chair.

Based on previous research, it has been shown that there was limited research that has examined the third focus of using symbols in communicating with children with autism, namely PACS,

COMPIC and GAMB. Based on this reason, the data in this research study are children with autism in SLB Negeri 1 Makassar by conducting interviews with several teachers who teach at different grades with different problems. In addition, the researcher also conducted interviews with the lecturers at SLB Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) Bandung, Faculty of Special Education to add information related to the research questions posed. One of the reasons that make this research interesting and needs to be done is that there are many children with autism who receive learning assistance from both formal education levels and attending therapists. Through this study, it will be revealed how symbols are used and the extent to which these symbols support the process of imagination and student responses in the case of children with autism.

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Each research certainly requires research methods, both in collecting data and analyzing data. The method used to achieve the desired goals or objectives. This research was descriptive. This research aims to make a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the facts and characteristics of the population or object being studied. This research also aims to describe the results of the research in the form of a narrative accompanied by pictures. The characteristics of descriptive research were verbal (text) and nonverbal (image) changes. However, this research, focuses on nonverbal (pictures) the term teaching in special schools (SLB) is called learning media. It is considered suitable to provide as detailed a description as possible by reality. This descriptive study was used to analyze the symbols used

This research used the qualitative research method. This method was considered “reflective” which places the researcher in their role as a subject who also utilized observational techniques (direct observations and interviews). The researcher did observations, conducted interviews in two different places, and had different levels of education, hoping to enrich the treasures of knowledge.

Researchers conducted interviews with two lecturers of SLB UPI Bandung. Interviews with the two informants were adjusted to several questions related to the discussion. Furthermore, conducting a second interview continued at SLB Negeri 1 Makassar. The method used to collect data related to the research problem. The steps are as follows:

1. Asking questions
2. Requesting the learning media used
3. Questioning the media used in learning
4. Questioning the success rate of the media
5. Documenting the media used by teachers called symbols

After describing the steps of data acquisition, it would be better to know the data analysis techniques. The data analysis stage is very decisive, because, at this stage, the rules governing the existence of the object of research must have been obtained. The discovery of these rules is the core of a scientific activity called research, no matter how simple the found rules are, in handling the data analysis stages, methods and techniques that are quite reliable are needed. Based on this type of research, data analysis techniques used to examine the object of research are observation and interview techniques. This technique is a process of giving the questions that the researchers ask.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section is the part that is expected to solve the problems raised in the research questions. Based on the existing problems, this research outlines two questions. Both of these things have been described in the previous discussion, the following are the results of the field visit.

Table 1

In interview in Field the informant of a lecturer at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI)

No	Questions	Answer
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- 1 How do deal with children with special needs, especially autism?

The needs are adjusted to the child's age, an assessment is carried out, and an assessment is needed to determine the level of problems in children. The assessment is carried out depending on the teacher.
- 2 How is the language feature: How does the teacher communicate with the child, is it limited to sign language?

The important thing to know together is that the essence of language is what is meant and desired. The point is that language can understand by the one who gives a speech and the recipient of the speech. Sign language is only a small way, usually using symbols to provide universal understanding, such as the icon of a food stall in general and agreed upon by the community, namely the image of a spoon and fork. Now there are tools to help little bit with autistic children get the message across and they can learn with the technology.
- 3 Without being guided by questions, the informant provided further information.

The assessment: consists of three, namely, media, methods, and materials/3M. special needs: intellectual; learning disability, communication, and social emotion. In children with autism, we see three things, namely looking for obstacles, children's strengths, and potential that can be developed.

Children with autism have difficulty communicating verbally. Therefore, they need Special Education i.e. special design. Special designs such as material content, designing methods used in teaching, using assessed media, and designing classes so that they feel comfortable in learning.

Children with autism are taught to use symbols according to their respective needs. For example, children who like to be taught manually will be taught using word cards, and children who like gadgets will be taught using gadgets.

the first visit to answer the first question on the problem statements. Furthermore, a follow-up field study will be carried out by making a mini-research design. Then, we will add informants to enrich the data, such as informants from teachers who work at the SLB Negeri 1 Makassar school. Here are the results of our second visit.

1. Interview with some teachers at SLB Negeri 1 Makassar

Informant

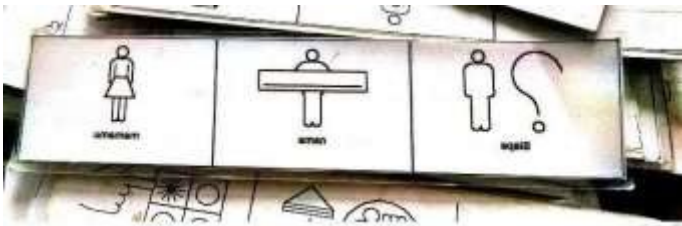

- 1. Dra. Nurhayati Pannu, a teacher at an elementary school in the first grade
- 2. Isnaeni Nurun Nisa, S.Pd., M.Pd, a teacher at an elementary school in the third grade
- 3. Februarita, S.Pd., a teacher at elementary school in the first grade and a therapist

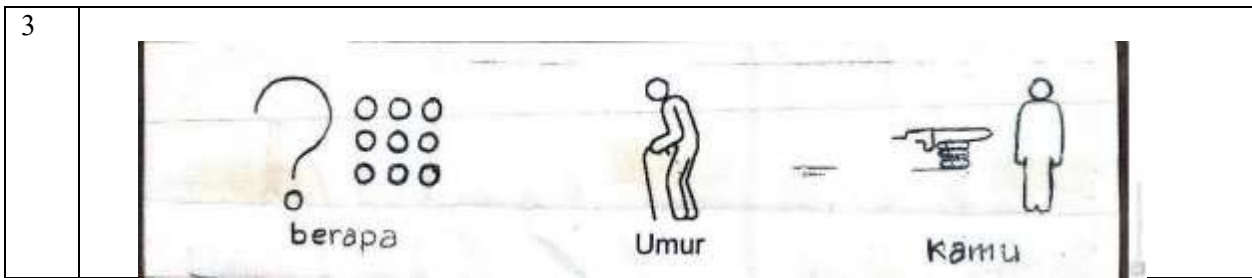
As previously explained, there will be new data related to autism discussion conducted at SLB Negeri 1 Makassar to find out the types of symbols used in teaching children with autism and to find out how teachers communicate with children with autism using symbols. The symbols referred to are as follows:

The kind of symbols		
PACS	COMPIC	GAMBAR

Before discussing the three types of symbols above, we will first describe the perspective of the teacher, in this case, the teacher at SLB Negeri 1 Makassar, on the autistic students they face with the understanding that the teacher has. According to informants, autism is divided into two categories, namely verbal and nonverbal. Although autistic students who can communicate verbally experience problems with focusing on receiving material, eye contact is the main point in determining the success or failure of the learning process. Eye contact is the main foundation. Moreover, non-verbal autism can only make voices that are formless or without clear words, he says like a mute child should get more attention because apart from not being able to respond to questions or requests from his teacher. So, when this child needs something, then he pulls the teacher's hand by pointing at the object he means or showing a picture in the room. this is where the role of symbols is in the learning process. Talk about learning visualizations/pictures that are very helpful. The images used are as follows:

Table 2
(Insert the name of the table here)

No	Symbols
1	
2	



There are many symbols that the teacher has in teaching question words or question sentences that require a response from students, the three pictures above are examples to show that the media is used by the teacher in building communication between teachers and students. Here are also symbols used in the form of images opposite words.


Table 3

(Insert the name of the table here)

No	Symbol
1	

No	Symbol
1	

2	

	
	<p>The pictures taught are adapted to the needs of students or real objects used in their daily lives.</p>

Visualization is very influential for children, therefore, teachers should try to divert the eye contact of autistic children. Because eye contact is the initial problem in communication or learning in class. When the teacher wants to order something for the child such as

"get the ball"

then the teacher will start introducing the shape of the ball, the word fetch will be shown with compic or demonstrated. However, it must be remembered that demonstrations or demonstrations of movements in front of children are very different from sign language, ¹even though sign language is avoided in direct communication between teachers and students. Because students will experience setbacks if they are taught sign language. After being taught the shape of the ball and already knowing the ball, then the colors of the ball are taught, such as red, black, and other colors. As in the example sentence "get the red ball" autistic children will easily understand with the help of compic.

Compic is very helpful when the child's focus is taken over. According to information from informants at the school, in addition to general autistic disorders, namely, focused eye contact, and socializing, the intelligence of children at the school is disturbed or slow to respond. Here's a picture for additional analysis.

Figure 1

(name of the figure)



In the picture above, the word "what" is taught repeatedly when knowing and fluent in the word, then proceed to the word "food" food is given an illustration that everything that can be eaten is given the "name of food" including fruit, cakes, and others. The word "your favorite" is also spaced according to the picture in the compic above. Talking about the use of symbols and increasing understanding by students, if there are students who experience increased communication (mild autism) then usually the teacher advises parents of students to move their children to regular or ²inclusive classes. To get an advanced level of learning, it should be transferred because the environment in the previous school was influential.

"Nabil" is one of the autistic students at SLB 1 Makassar who is easy to read at the 1st-grade

level. However, his handicap is very difficult to motor his hand to draw. Nabil compared to his peers who are very easy to read and communicate can be built more. The role of symbols in autistic children is more specifically for Nabil's brother who has developed a good level of obedience. In addition to eye contact which is very important I discussed in the previous chapter, obedience is the first step the teacher must fix. On the basis that there will be no eye contact if there is no obedience from students, for example, autistic children who like to stand and walk do not even want to sit in their chairs, the *mindset* of obedience is the teacher's effort. After obedience, they

make eye contact and after eye contact, there is then taught what to teach that day. From there the level of success/role of the symbol is known after all stages have been passed.

CONCLUSION

Autistic children are one of the many children with special needs, needs that must be considered properly to find out the learning needs of autistic children, a teacher needs to understand the characteristics of autistic children. The attitudes and behavior of autistic children are distinctive behaviors that are easily recognized by the human eye, from the behavioral aspect of autistic children there are hyperactive (excessive) and hypoactive (deficient). Due to the lack of excess funds, several tools, images, or symbols are needed to help teachers convey their intentions, and images or symbols are certainly known as effective learning media for students, especially children with autism.

The use of symbols in teaching communication to children with autism is very effective. It is said to be very effective because autistic children can slowly communicate with the people around them even though it takes a very long time. Of course, through the help of the use of symbols, there is a change in the behavior of the sufferer. Children show better behavior, which was previously very difficult to communicate with, but after being taught symbols it makes it easier for them to follow directions from the teacher. Although there has been progressing from time to time with the support of symbols, in daily activities as usual at school, the pronunciation is still limited for non-verbal ones in conveying the meaning to be conveyed. Likewise, those with verbal disorders, very rarely use symbols when in class, because of the limitations of nearby images, it takes time to show these symbols. Moreover, symbols outside the classroom are very minimally used from the teaching materials he has learned. Yuyus said that good communication between teachers and those being taught is communication that is easy to understand, which in essence understands each other.

For communication to show progress, an assessment is needed for students, regarding the needs of each individual. An assessment can make teachers better prepare for media or how to teach subjects in class. Because students, like manual image media, on the other hand, like electronic devices such as gadgets. Then students whose needs and hobbies are known will be introduced to symbols through the device. In addition to the success of students in communication, eye contact, and responses to questions or requests from teachers, it is also necessary that the therapist be realized by one of the teachers who also acts as a special therapist for children with autism.

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