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Effective Learning Strategies to Overcome Concentration Barriers in Tunagrahita Children at SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aims to identify and analyze effective learning strategies in overcoming concentration barriers in children with disabilities at SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun.

Methodology: This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation with students with disabilities, teachers, and caregivers. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman interactive model.

Main Findings: The results showed that the implementation of various strategies such as direct learning, individualized teaching, behavior modification strategies, lecture method, and the use of learning media (pictures) were able to improve students' focus, motivation, and engagement. Regular evaluation by teachers is also proven to support learning effectiveness. Supporting factors include teacher commitment, small number of students, and comfortable classroom atmosphere. Meanwhile, the main obstacle is students' emotional instability.

Novelty/Originality of this study: Previous research has discussed learning for children with special needs in general, but has not specifically examined effective learning strategies to overcome concentration barriers in students with intellectual disabilities in classroom practice. This gap highlights the need for more focused studies on applicable and contextual learning strategies. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze effective learning strategies in overcoming concentration barriers in children with intellectual disabilities at SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Children with special needs are children who have mental or physical limitations. Physical, emotional, intellectual, and social factors influence their development and growth more significantly than those of other children their age. Children with disabilities are children who face the greatest obstacles; they must have conditioned abilities such as thinking ability, intelligence ability, language ability, and emotional ability, because children with intellectual disabilities depend on their mood conditions, it will be difficult if their mood is disturbed or bad [1]. It should be noted that children with physical and mental limitations basically cannot be equated with normal children. For their learning process to run smoothly, they require special assistance. Tunagrahita is one example of abnormalities in children with special needs [2]. Tunagrahita, also known as mental retardation, is a disorder that begins in infancy and is characterized by limitations in below-average intellectual functioning and a lack of ability to adapt. According to the Annual Report to Congress, 1.92% of school-age children have a

disability, with a ratio of 60% males and 40% females, or 3:2. The number of mentally retarded people in Indonesia is currently estimated to be around 1-3% of the total population, or around 6.6 million people [3].

Of the 158,792 special education students in Indonesia for the 2023/2024 academic year, more than 17% attend schools in West Java. This number is the highest in Java. Compiling data from Dapodik regarding statistics on special schools for the 2023/2024 school year, it was revealed that Indonesia has a total of 158,792 students in public and private special schools. More than 50% of the students are on Java Island (89,404), and the rest (69,388) are spread across various islands and regions in Indonesia [4]. Children with special needs also have the right to receive education, just like other children, so that they can participate in the life of their community and country. Therefore, the government presents special schools as some of the special education units intended for children with disabilities. In Indonesia, special schools have four levels. These include kindergarten, primary school, junior high school, and senior high school, with the largest number of students in primary school (52.5%) and the smallest in kindergarten (1.2%). In addition, students in SLB are also regrouped based on six disabilities, namely, visually impaired, disabled, deaf, autistic, and others [4].

In the learning process, concentration has a significant influence on learning outcomes; therefore, every child participating in the learning process at school is expected to concentrate well. Lack of concentration in children with special needs, such as Tunagrahita, can be a barrier to responding to environmental stimuli and understanding learning materials. According to Darmono in [5], concentration can be interpreted as an effort to direct the mind's activity to a particular experience. In addition to difficulty following lessons and low academic achievement, this condition can also hinder students' cognitive development, including problem-solving skills and positive learning attitudes. Concentration refers to the focused mental effort on an object, such as the concentration of thought or attention. Slameto in [6] reveals that concentration in learning means putting aside everything that has nothing to do with the lesson and focusing on the subject. Loss of focus in children with tunagrahita can cause activities to be ineffective, especially when they are in the classroom. These children's learning ability is highly dependent on their concentration skills. Therefore, they need to develop the habit of concentration.

One of the efforts to overcome concentration barriers for children with special needs, such as those with Tourette's, is to utilize effective learning strategies. Learning strategies play a crucial role in achieving success in learning activities [7]. According to Sadiman in [8], Learning strategies in a broad sense can include methods, approaches, selection of sources and media, grouping students, and assessing their success. Learning strategies, as outlined by Dick and Carry in [9], encompass all components of learning materials and stages of learning activities that teachers utilize to help students achieve their learning objectives. Mumpuniarti in [9] argues that the learning strategy chosen for people with disabilities is tailored to the situation, characteristics and goals set, in this case the learning strategy applied is not teacher-centered but student-centered where the teacher also provides opportunities for children with disabilities to be directly involved in learning both guided and learning together with other students.

The learning strategy referred to in this study is a method for guiding students on how to learn, remember, think critically, and motivate themselves. Children with special needs, such as those with tunagrahita, require a learning strategy that is tailored to their abilities. In their education, children with disabilities need effective learning media to develop their potential, one of which is multimedia learning media. Educators use multimedia in education because it can make the learning process more engaging. This is because students can see, listen, and understand the material more easily, as well as get higher motivation. Teachers can also combine various media simultaneously and collaborate on one strategy with another. Thus, the use of fun media can increase students' attention and interest in learning [10].

Previous studies have discussed learning strategies for children with special needs in general. Rahayu et al. conducted a study on teaching approaches used for children with intellectual disabilities at SLB N 5 Bengkulu [1]. On the other hand, Indahwati et al. discussed the relationship between family support and the independence of children with intellectual disabilities [2]. However, neither of these studies specifically examined learning methods aimed at helping children with intellectual disabilities improve their concentration directly in the classroom. Other studies by Johar and Latifah [7], as well as Mumpuniarti in her paper on individual therapy for children with intellectual disabilities [9], also did not emphasize individualized approaches and behavioral modifications in the learning process for children with intellectual disabilities. Thus, there is a research gap regarding the lack of empirical and applied studies on learning strategies specifically designed to improve the concentration of students with intellectual disabilities in the SLB environment.

This study presents novelty by directly examining the learning strategies applied by teachers at SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun in overcoming concentration barriers in students with intellectual disabilities, through observation, interviews, and documentation. The urgency of this research lies in the importance of providing practical and contextual recommendations for teachers in designing effective learning for students with intellectual disabilities, as well as contributing to the development of more adaptive pedagogical practices in special education.

Previous research has discussed learning for children with special needs in general, but has not specifically examined effective learning strategies to overcome concentration barriers in students with intellectual disabilities in classroom practice. This gap highlights the need for more focused studies on applicable and

contextual learning strategies. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze effective learning strategies in overcoming concentration barriers in children with intellectual disabilities at SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS

Tunagrahita is a condition in which individuals experience limitations in intellectual development, which hinders the achievement of optimal development [11]. This disorder includes barriers in mental and philosophical aspects that have a significant impact on cognitive function and behavior [12]. Some of the common symptoms that appear in individuals with tunagrahita include difficulty focusing attention, unstable emotions, and a tendency to be quiet [13]. They also often have difficulty adjusting to the social environment and understanding abstract concepts. These difficulties are closely related to the level of intelligence that is below average. As such, tunagrahita not only encompasses limited intellectual abilities but also has a significant impact on the daily activities and quality of life of the sufferer.

According to [14], mentally retarded children are classified into three levels based on the severity of the condition as well as their IQ score. The first level is mild tunagrahita, or often referred to as debil, with an IQ range between 50/55 70/75. Children in this category can still follow an academic education, adjust to a wider social environment, demonstrate independence in some activities, and perform simple tasks. The second level is moderately retarded, also known as embryonic, with an IQ range of 20/25 to 50/55. Children in this category are generally able to take care of themselves in some aspects, perform tasks safely in a supervised environment, and can communicate and socialize within their immediate environment. Meanwhile, the third level is severely retarded, or idiotic, with an IQ below 20/25. Children in this category are completely dependent on assistance and care from others throughout their lives.

[15] It is argued that children with tunagrahita generally have three main characteristics. First, academically, they exhibit very limited learning abilities due to difficulties with memory, logical and abstract thinking, and problem-solving. Secondly, emotionally and socially, they tend to have a less active personality, are emotionally unstable, uninteresting, and lack a broad outlook. Thirdly, from a physical aspect, motor development, such as walking and speech, occurs more slowly than in other children.

Meanwhile, according to [16], there are nine common characteristics in children with deafblindness, namely: (1) delays or obstacles in speech, (2) delays in motor development such as sitting, crawling, or walking, (3) difficulties in understanding rules, (4) weak memory, (5) delays in mastering basic daily skills such as bathing and dressing, (6) difficulty understanding the relationship between cause and effect, (7) the emergence of problematic behaviors such as tantrums, (8) inability to think logically, and (9) obstacles in solving problems.

Haryadi in [17] learning concentration has several indicators based on several of these definitions, namely the concentration of attention for a long time, attention that does not spread, ignoring things that are not related to learning, thoughts directed to one focus, and not being affected by other things not related to the learning process. Concentration is the ability to focus attention on certain relevant objects while excluding other unrelated stimuli [18]. Concentration is the ability to focus attention on one object or task without being distracted by other things. When children with disabilities have difficulty concentrating, they often struggle to absorb information effectively, which hinders their learning process. This can result in low motivation to learn and poor academic performance. It is essential to recognize that these concentration barriers are not solely caused by visible factors, but also by the child's psychological state [19].

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This case study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on analyzing specific events, environments, and situations to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Denzin & Lincoln in [20] argue that this research is classified as qualitative with a descriptive type. In addition, Marvasti in [20] states that qualitative research provides a detailed understanding of the subject's substance or human experience. Qualitative research is research that starts from facts or phenomena; this research tries to find the "meaning" behind events or phenomena. This research was conducted at SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun, Pangongangan Village, Manguharjo District, Madiun City, with the research subject being children with tunagrahita disabilities. This approach is a research procedure conducted at field locations to describe notions, symptoms, or phenomena narratively. In the research conducted, the researchers used interactive analysis to process the data, based on concepts developed by Miles and Huberman [21].

The data analysis technique employed in this study followed the Miles and Huberman model strategy, which comprises four main stages: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the first stage, researchers collected data through interviews, observation, and qualitative documentation. Sources of data were obtained from one student, one teacher, and one student caregiver at SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun. The data were then condensed by sorting, simplifying, and grouping information relevant to the research focus. Furthermore, the condensed data is presented in narrative form to facilitate understanding

and drawing meaning from the information collected. The final stage is conclusion drawing and verification, where researchers compile temporary interpretations of the analyzed data, then review the findings to ensure consistency and validity.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. General Description of Location

SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun is located on Jl. A. Yani No. 17, Pangongangan Village, Manguharjo District, Madiun City. This school is a private educational institution under the auspices of the Bhakti Luhur Foundation, which focuses on education for children with special needs, including those with tunagrahita. SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun aims to provide equal learning opportunities and develop students' potential to live independently and play an active role in society. The facilities at this school are adequate, featuring spacious classrooms, an ideal student-to-teacher ratio (2-3 students per class), a UKS room, and several other supporting spaces. Educators at this school are recognized for their enthusiasm and dedication in fulfilling their duties.

In class VI, where the observation took place, there were three students and one teacher, serving as the main instructor. The teacher works with students who have varying levels of intellectual disabilities, ranging from mild to moderate. During the observation, the researcher noted that the learning process occurred in an informal yet structured atmosphere. The teacher employs a friendly, unhurried approach and provides personalized attention to each student. The classroom atmosphere was quite calm, although there were occasional instances where students lost focus or exhibited repetitive behavior.

4.2. Planning Effective Learning Strategies for Children with Special Needs: Tunagrahita in Overcoming Concentration Barriers

In the learning process, educators need to prepare a careful plan. Learning planning is an activity carried out by teachers to design various aspects of learning, including goals, materials, strategies, and evaluation. Based on the results of interviews conducted in June 2025 at SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun with one of the teachers, Mrs. Ita, it was found that learning plans for children with special needs, such as tunagrahita, are arranged in the form of lesson plans, which are not significantly different from those for children in general. This lesson plan aims to determine the most appropriate strategies, media, and evaluation to be applied.

The planning process to overcome concentration barriers for children with special needs who have tunagrahita involves several important steps. One of them is preparing a learning strategy that includes the methods and media that will be used. This learning strategy plays an important role in achieving success in learning activities [22].

Lesson planning is an important step that every teacher must take. In this process, classroom teachers prepare by designing learning strategies that include the strategy and media to be used. All these plans are poured into the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) document. According to Suardi, in [21], it is expected that by choosing the right strategies and techniques, students will be more motivated to participate in learning.

4.3. Implementation of Effective Learning Strategies for Children with Special Needs: Tunagrahita in Overcoming Concentration Barriers

During the learning process, several important factors must be considered. At the beginning of the learning process, the teacher does not immediately deliver the material. Instead, the teacher invites students to pray and asks about their condition. The purpose of this is to make students feel calmer. By chatting casually with students, the teacher can gauge their emotional state. If students are in a bad mood, they will find it more difficult to understand the lesson. When students feel uncomfortable, the teacher will invite them to sing and give them a piece of paper to draw and crumple [22].

During the learning process, the teacher employs various instructional methods. A teacher can choose from a variety of methods available, tailored to the objectives, materials, and abilities of the students. The various strategies applied to overcome concentration problems in children with disabilities include direct teaching strategies and contextualized teaching. Teachers need to apply appropriate methods in addition to using teaching strategies that match children's abilities and characteristics [23]. Methods play a crucial role in the learning process. When methods are applied appropriately, the learning process will fulfill the learning objectives. Teachers employ lecture and task methods to help children with special needs overcome concentration problems. Learning media are utilized in the educational process to help children with special needs understand the material more easily. Pictures or cards are installed as a learning tool.

Learning strategies for children with learning disabilities are essentially the same as those for learning overall. In general, improving the focus of children with deafblindness requires the use of appropriate learning methods, according to the needs and characteristics of each individual. For this reason, teachers need to recognize that the strategies and methods used to deliver material to students have a significant impact on their success in

the learning process [24]. Here are some ways that can support the improvement of concentration in children with tunagrahita based on the results of observations in research conducted in class VI SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun, from May to June 2025, including:

4.3.1. Direct Learning Strategy

It is a learning method that employs a carefully designed, step-by-step approach to giving orders or instructions. The direct learning model is a type of learning that is largely directed by the teacher [25]. The results of the researcher's observations showed that to overcome the concentration barriers faced by children with special needs in class VI SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun, the teachers employed direct learning strategies. This strategy can be seen when teachers provide material to students with disabilities in a short duration. After explaining and giving examples, the teacher asks the students to come forward. Furthermore, they are assigned tasks to complete in their respective books within the provided timeframe. In this way, the teacher can assess the children's ability to understand the lesson and how concentrated they are when listening to the teacher's explanation [26].

This is supported by the opinion of one of the informants, which aligns with the research results [24], confirming that the direct learning strategy involves the teacher delivering material in a gradual and structured manner, accompanied by clear examples and instructions. Four learning strategies are applied, namely communication strategy, task analysis, direct instruction, and cooperative learning. The use of these strategies is considered effective because it enables students to overcome various forms of learning difficulties, including those with attention deficit, hyperactivity, and slow learning, allowing them to understand learning materials more easily.

4.3.2. Individualized Teaching Strategies

Individualized learning strategies have a different meaning from individualized teaching. Individualized teaching refers to the learning process given to one person at a specific time and place. Teachers need to be able to recognize the situation of the students, especially for children with disabilities. Sometimes, during learning, students may appear lethargic, daydream, or even fall asleep. Therefore, to help them re-concentrate on learning, special attention through a personal approach is needed. This aims to make students feel that their teachers are like parents in the school environment [27].

On the other hand, individualized teaching is tailored to each student, even though they study the same subject together. From the observation in class VI SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun, the teachers who teach use the surrounding situation to start learning. For example, the teacher takes the theme of learning, which is obtained from students by observing what they bring, and can also come from activities on that day or from the surrounding environment. Suppose some children miss lessons or still do not understand the material being taught. In that case, this individualized strategy is applied, namely, providing additional hours for children who are behind in their material. In this case, the depth and breadth of learning material is adjusted to the abilities and needs of each child[28].

4.3.3. Behavior Modification Strategy

This strategy is the most effective approach to apply to groups of students with diverse abilities, such as in education, where children with disabilities are integrated to learn alongside their peers [29]. This strategy is applied when dealing with children who have lower to moderate levels of deafblindness or those with deafblindness who are experiencing additional challenges.

Based on observations, in class VI SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun applies this strategy intended to change, remove or reduce bad behavior to good behavior. In its implementation, the teacher must skillfully choose the behavior that must be eliminated. Meanwhile, special techniques are also needed in implementing these behavior modifications, such as reinforcement in the form of praise, gifts, or advice. Praise is given when students show the behavior desired by the teacher. And the provision of reinforcement is increasingly reduced so as not to depend [30], [31].

4.3.4. Lecture Strategy

During the learning process, classroom teachers frequently employ the lecture strategy to explain material to students. In addition, based on the observation, teachers at SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun also utilize and apply this strategy to provide motivation and support to students, especially when they seem less prepared to participate in learning. The motivation can take the form of songs or other activities designed to uplift the students' spirits and moods [32].

Lecture strategy is an approach used by teachers to deliver learning materials to students. In this strategy, teachers provide explanations directly to students [33][34]. When applying this strategy, the teacher explains slowly, using clear lip movements and language that students with disabilities can easily understand. Based on observations in class VI SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun, children can concentrate for a long time when the teacher uses a lecture strategy.

4.3.5. Use of learning media

The learning media used in the education of children with disabilities are not significantly different from those used in the general education of children. However, education for children with disabilities requires more learning aids, given the limitations in their intellectual abilities. In addition to having limitations in cognitive abilities, students with disabilities also tend to have low motivation in following the learning process. Therefore, it is essential to enhance their motivation and facilitate their understanding by utilizing the appropriate learning media [35].

Based on observations, it is known that to overcome concentration barriers in children with special needs, such as those with tunagrahita, in SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun, one of the media used by teachers is picture cards for object recognition. These cards help children express their desires, as well as picture word cards that children will learn. An example can be seen in Figure 1 (center), where the class teacher asked the researcher to try to ask the children how they felt when the class started by showing them a photo and a caption on the wall. Thus, the children followed the directions, which means they listened and focused on the activity.

Image media refers to any content that can be used to convey messages (learning materials), thereby stimulating students' attention, interest, motivation, thoughts, and feelings during teaching and learning activities to achieve learning goals [36]. This approach aims to help children understand the material and make it easier for children to concentrate. This statement is reinforced by research conducted by Nur Hidayati in [37], which shows that the use of learning media in the form of images can help students with tunagrahita in understanding the material taught. With real pictures, it is expected that students can better recognize the original form of the material presented by the teacher and it is evident that during the learning process the students are very focused and fully concentrated on the teacher.



Figure 1. Learning Situation in Class VI SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun
Source: Research Documentation, 2025

4.4. Evaluation of Effective Learning Strategies for Children with Special Needs: Tunagrahita in Overcoming Concentration Barriers

At the end of each learning session, a teacher would want to assess and understand the level of improvement in children's concentration. Therefore, it is important to evaluate students. Learning evaluation can be explained as a step to assess whether the learning objectives that have been set have been achieved. The purpose of assessment is to understand the extent of student success in receiving the learning provided by the teacher [37].

Based on the results of observations and interviews conducted, it is known that to overcome concentration problems in children with special needs of tunagrahita in SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun, teachers assess tunagrahita students after the learning process is complete. The evaluation strategy used by teachers involves asking questions about the material that has been learned and the activities carried out during the application of teaching media strategies to assess how well students with disabilities can maintain focus in the learning space [38].

4.5. Supporting and Hindering Factors in the Implementation of Effective Learning Strategies for Children with Special Needs of Tunagrahita in Overcoming Concentration Barriers

Learning strategies for children with special needs depend not only on the methods used but also on external supporting factors that facilitate the learning process. Based on this research, teachers' dedication and commitment to serving students are the main supporting factors. Based on the testimonies of the teachers studied, they are very concerned about the development of their children. They always build a comfortable, friendly, and open classroom atmosphere. Students feel more relaxed and understand lessons more easily when teachers interact patiently and empathetically [39].

The small class size also helps, as the teacher can provide individualized attention to each student. In a class with only three students, teachers can use an individualized approach, identify the unique characteristics of each student, and create more targeted learning strategies. Since learning cannot be done en masse, but must be tailored to each child's unique profile, this condition is very supportive of teaching children with special needs. Additionally, emotional support from fellow teachers helps create a positive working atmosphere at school. This approach is in line with the idea of emotional education [40], which states that a safe and positive learning

environment will increase children's desire and involvement. In addition, small class sizes allow teachers to apply different strategies.

However, on the other hand, there are significant barriers that hinder the effectiveness of learning. The main obstacle identified in implementing the research through observations and interviews was the students' fickle emotional stamina. They easily feel mentally tired and lack concentration. During the observation, it was noted that some students became frustrated when they encountered challenging material or were asked to complete specific tasks. These findings are consistent with research [41] which reveals that children with intellectual disabilities may have difficulty understanding what other people say. They may also understand what we say, but they are unable to express their thoughts and feelings. This is a factor that causes difficulties for children with intellectual disabilities in communicating. Ultimately, they become anxious and aggressive due to these difficulties. In situations like this, teachers need to be more patient and effectively manage their emotions. Therefore, teachers should be regularly trained to effectively manage the behavior and psychology of children with special needs. Thus, the planned learning strategies can be implemented well.

This study has limitations in terms of the very limited number of participants, namely only three students in one class at SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun. This limitation restricts the generalization of findings to other special schools with different student characteristics and learning conditions. In addition, data collection was carried out in a relatively short period of time, so it cannot fully represent the dynamics of learning. Further research with a broader scope and longer duration is needed to strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of learning strategies that include direct learning, individual instruction, behavior modification, lecture methods, and the use of visual media has proven effective in addressing concentration issues among students with intellectual disabilities at SLB Bhakti Luhur Madiun. The success of these strategies is supported by teacher commitment, limited class sizes, and a conducive learning environment. However, students' emotional instability remains a significant barrier in the learning process. This finding emphasizes the importance of adopting adaptive and individualized approaches in education for students with special needs. Therefore, several strategic steps are recommended to support the sustainability of the program, namely: (1) regular training for teachers in behavior management and the application of individualized approaches; (2) strengthening collaboration between the school and parents; and (3) developing an adaptive curriculum that is sensitive to the emotional conditions of students with intellectual disabilities.

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