# IDENTIFICATION SOCIAL SKILLS OF AUTISTIC STUDENTS IN INSTRUCTIONAL LEARNING AT SURAKARTA INCLUSIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

**Novita Dwi Wulandari, Sunardi, Joko Yuwono**
Sebelas Maret University, Indonesia
Email: dwiwulandarinovita9@gmail.com,sunardi.ipuns@gmail.com,
    jokoyuwono@staff.uns.ac.id

## Abstract

The purpose of this preliminary study research is to identify the extent of social skills of autistic students in learning settings at SD Inklusi Surakarta. The research method is descriptive, the instrument used is in the form of observation instruments by teachers or teacher ratings and interview instruments to increase the completeness of the results. The time for data collection is in May 2023. The sample in this preliminary study was 11 elementary school students in the Surakarta inclusion school. The results showed that most students had social skills in learning settings that were quite low categrated. The conclusion of this preliminary study is that there are many factors that cause students' social skills to be low, including internal factors from students and external factors from the environment including schools.

**Keywords:** Social skills, autistic students, learning settings,

## INTRODUCTION

A preliminary study is a study conducted to find out the information needed by researchers so that the problem becomes clearer (Surakhmad, 2012). This study focuses on preliminary studies to obtain information on the extent of social skills possessed by autistic students in learning settings in inclusive elementary schools in Surakarta. Cartledge and Milburn (Purnamasari & Khotmi, 2014) mentions that social skills are the ability to interact with others in a social context in special ways that are acceptable to the environment and at the same time can help individuals, mutually benefit, or benefit others. Social skills are the foundation of abilities that help individuals adapt to a variety of social settings (Rizkiana et al., 2019). From this it is known that social skills are one of the most important factors that can be used by humans as individuals to be able to unite in sharing social settings. Of course, social skills must be owned by everyone, but in their development in each individual must be different (Ulum, 2019)

Differences in the development of social skills for each individual are different, especially in children with special needs, including autism. As is known, autistic children are one of the children with special needs who have complex developmental disorders.

According to the DSM V, children with autism spectrum diagnostics (*ASD*) are children who have complex neurodevelopmental disorders that cause impaired communication and social interaction. Individuals with autistic diagnostics exhibit interest or repetitive behavior. Autistic symptoms begin at an early age and cause a variety of developmental problems that significantly hinder the function of daily life (APA, 2013). IDEA (*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*) Autism is part of a developmental problem that significantly impacts the ability of verbal, non-verbal, social interaction communication that usually occurs before the age of 3 years (Yuwono, 2015).

Based on the expert opinion above, it can be concluded that autism is part of a complex and severe developmental disorder, the developmental disorder results in disturbances in emotional and perceptual disorders, as well as impaired interaction and social communication. Lack of social and communication skills affects the lives of individuals with autism directly or indirectly. In turn, limited social skills can affect their ability to reach normal developmental milestones and build satisfying relationships with family and friends (Rao et al., 2018). Given the widespread changes in education laws, there has been an increase in the encouragement for autistic children to be educated in classrooms with peers in general. Therefore, social skills of autistic children, especially to blend in with peers in a school environment, are needed. One of the most intersecting environments with regard to social relationships and social stimulus is the school environment of autistic children.(Hansen et al., 2014)

There are autistic children who attend public or inclusion schools, hereinafter referred to as autistic students. Van Tran, Pham, Mai, Le, & Nguyen mentioned that inclusive education for autistic children is an organizational and learning practice where autistic children are in the same classroom as children in general (Van Tran et al., 2020). Because of the large amount of support for autistic children to attend inclusive schools, it is necessary to develop students' social skills in these learning settings. Before an intervention is given regarding the development of social skills of autistic students, it is necessary to know the extent of social skills of autistic children in inclusive schools and what learning is like in schools.

This research is the first step to identify the social skills ability of autistic students and find out how many barriers to learning social skills of students in the learning environment at school. Precisely at the inclusive elementary school Surakarta.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study used descriptive research method. Descriptive research according to Sukmadinata (2020) Intended to describe or describe existing phenomena, both natural and engineering phenomena. This preliminary study was conducted in one of the inclusive elementary schools in Surakarta City. The time for the preliminary study is October 2022. The subjects of this study were autistic students in grades 1-6 totaling 11 students, and all of them were male.The sampling technique used by researchers is purposive sampling, because the sample is determined intentionally by the researcher in accordance with the criteria. The data collection techniques used are observations made by special guidance teachers who accompany the learning of autistic students and interviews to complete data to special guidance teachers. The instrument used is an observation instrument in the form of a Likert scale that has been tested for validity and reliability. The instrument was developed by containing aspects of social skills according to Carledge and Milburg including behavior with the environment, interpersonal behavior

or relating to others, behavior with oneself, and behavior with tasks. The preparation of the instrument is adjusted to the instrument of measuring the social skills of autistic students according to *Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (*TRIAD) (Stone et al., 2021). Interview sheets are used to obtain information directly arranged according to the criteria of evaluating learning needs. Data analysis uses data tabulation ranging from data classification, data presentation, to descriptive analysis.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of research in this preliminary study were grouped into 2 parts, namely measuring the social skills of autistic students to determine the extent of the ability of social skills of autistic students in learning settings. and the second is the evaluation of social skills learning of autistic students at school

**1. Measurement of Social Skills of Autistic Students in Learning Settings**

The measurement of the social skill level of Autistic students at SD Inklusi Surakarta was carried out in October 2022. This measurement aims to determine the extent of the level of social skills of autistic students in learning settings at SD Al-Firdaus Surakarta. The instruments used in this study are instruments developed based on social skills theory by Cartledge and Milburg and adapted to the identification of Autistic social skills by TRIAD which has been validated by experts.

The subjects taken are all students of grades I-VI. Here's a list of students and classes of the subject

**Table 1 List of Research Subjects**

| No. | Subject | Gender | Class |
|-----|---------|--------|-------|
| 1 | SA1 | M | 1 |
| 2 | SA2 | M | 2 |
| 3 | SA3 | M | 2 |
| 4 | SA4 | M | 2 |
| 5 | SA5 | M | 3 |
| 6 | SA6 | M | 3 |
| 7 | SA7 | M | 4 |
| 8 | SA8 | M | 5 |
| 9 | SA9 | M | 5 |
| 10 | SA10 | M | 6 |
| 11 | SA11 | M | 6 |

All 11 autistic students were observed for social skill-related behavior by each tutor in particular. Using an observation instrument of 25 items with a Likert scale of 1-4. Score 1 for the incapable/not good to score 4 for independent/best. Before filling out the form, researchers collected data first related to how long the teacher knew the child. The results of the data acquisition show that the average teacher has known children for at least 4 months to 2 years. This is to reduce measurement habits. After obtaining the measurement results, it will proceed to categorization. Categorization aims to place individuals into separate groups in tiers according to a continuum based on the attributes measured  (Azwar, 2011).

**Table 2 results of measuring students' social skills**

| No. | Subyek | Nilai |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | SA1 | 57 |
| 2 | SA2 | 61 |
| 3 | SA3 | 62 |
| 4 | SA4 | 45 |
| 5 | SA5 | 61 |
| 6 | SA6 | 62 |
| 7 | SA7 | 64 |
| 8 | SA8 | 61 |
| 9 | SA9 | 62 |
| 10 | SA10 | 51 |
| 11 | SA11 | 68 |

**Table 3 results of statistical descriptive results**

| **Statistics** | | |
|---|---|---|
| SP1 | | |
| N | Valid | 11 |
| | Missing | 0 |
| Mean | | 59.2727 |
| Median | | 61.0000 |
| Mode | | 62.00 |
| Std. Deviation | | 6.35753 |
| Minimum | | 45.00 |
| Maximum | | 68.00 |
| Sum | | 652.00 |

The average social skills measurement score of autistic students was 59.27. When viewed in categories, the score is in the fairly low category. The lowest score obtained is 45 and the highest score is 68. The following.

**Table 4 Grouped Frequencies of Categorization of Social Skills of Autistic Students In Learning Settings**

| kat_keterampilansosial | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid Low | 1 | 9.1 | 9.1 | 9.1 |
| Quite Low | 8 | 72.7 | 72.7 | 81.8 |
| Quite High | 2 | 18.2 | 18.2 | 100.0 |
| Total | 11 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Data on the social skills category found that most autistic students with a percentage of 72.7% were in the social skills category which was quite low. There are 9.1% of students who have a low social skills category, and 18.2% of students already have a fairly high social skills category. However, none of the students have high social skills yet.

**1. Evaluation of Social Skills Learning in Autistic Students**

In completing information about the social skills of autistic students, it is necessary to interview teachers about learning social skills of students at school. Penliti conducted structured interviews with teachers who taught autistic students at the school. The interview instrument was developed based on the needs evaluation guide by BSNP (2006).

The first indicator is related to learning resources and media used and contains several questions. In the question item of the availability of special hours to teach social skills of autistic students, the teacher answered that there are no special hours. For teaching time social skills to students are usually included in learning materials or at leisure time such as breaks and or extracurricular time. Teachers also stated that the learning available in schools was sufficient to support the social skills needs of students. Media media used to teach social skills are used through image media and / or examples from peers, obstacles faced when teaching social skills are lack of qualified media and difficulty adjusting time.

The second indicator is the strategy or learning method provided. Special guidance teachers have used teaching methods for autistic children including the loovas method, pecs, and the application of the principle of reward, punishment.

On the indicators of effective approach and evaluation concerns the evaluation of needs related to learning social skills. Regarding the question of whether media development is needed to improve the social skills of autistic students, teachers answered yes and support the development of a media, as well as interest in learning media innovation.

The results of the study regarding the extent of social skills of autistic students in learning settings, it was found that autistic students in SD inclusion Surakarta city still mostly still have quite low social skills. This is indicated by 72.7% of students who obtain a fairly low category. In fact, there are 9.1% of students who have low social skills categories. The low results of social skills are inseparable from the characteristics of autistic students as conveyed by Atmaja (2018) Among one of the characteristics of autistic children is having problems with social interaction. Where he has problems in less in making eye contact directly and does not like to play with peers. Whereas the problem of playing with peers and eye contact is one part of the aspect of social skills conveyed by Cartledge and Milburn, namely intrapersonal behavior or behavior related to others.

In addition to intrapersonal behavior, Cartledge and Milburn conveyed 3 other aspects related to social skills, namely behavior with the environment, behavior related to self, and behavior related to tasks. The low social ability of autistic students in learning settings is inseparable from the musty aspects conveyed by Cartledge and Milburn. As well as the characteristics of autistic children written by the DSM V include having patterns of behavior or interests and repetitive activities. With these characteristics, autistic children have limitations to have initiative and sensitivity to their environment. Therefore, autistic students also have behavior with a fairly low environment according to the results of the study.

According to Yuwono (2015) convey that autistic children have characteristics of playing in their own world and impulsive behavior. This is also what causes autistic children to be less in forming behaviors that are related to themselves, such as controlling feelings and the ability to adjust to the surrounding environment.

Autistic children also have motor and perceptual disorders (APA, 2015) So it is sometimes difficult to regulate sensitivity to certain texts or sounds and is less able to understand the functionality of limbs. This is what makes autistic children difficult to complete task-related behaviors. This is why the social skills of autistic students are still low in terms of internals.

Given the social skills factor, according to Sunarto & Agung Hartono, (2018) There are 2 factors, so it is necessary to know other factors besides internal factors. Namely external factors including the environment. The closest environment to autistic students besides the family environment is the school environment. The school environment where students are given the opportunity to learn and try to provide a place for students to interact with peers in general. One of the school environments that provides this forum is an inclusive school environment. In one of the inclusive schools in Surakarta, there are several factors that cause why autistic students still have low social skills. Among them is that there are no specific learning resources for learning social skills because there are basically no hours given to teach them. Usually teachers teach social skills tucked into certain subjects or during self-development hours as well as at leisure time such as recess. Meanwhile, to help teach some social skills, teachers use media in the form of picture cards such as *sequence* cards  and examples from friends. The obstacles experienced by teachers in pursuing social skills are in the media used and time adjustments and limited to monotonous methods.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of preliminary studies, it was found that most autistic students still have social skills in learning settings that are quite low. This is evidenced by 72.9% of students who obtained this fairly low category. The low social skills of these students are inseparable from the catacteristics of autistic individuals themselves and the absence of support from schools regarding the learning of adequate social skills.

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