Towards independent learning of disabled students through optimisation of humanistic approaches

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Abstract

Students with disabilities have equal rights in the service of education. They need extra help in learning and developing independence. Learning in the pandemic era could not be implemented optimally. There were several obstacles when learning during the pandemic era, e.g., limited teacher–student communication, material constraints and learning methods. This condition raises the problem of developing students with disabilities' independence in the pandemic era. This article describes and analyses how humanistic approaches can develop students with disabilities' independent learning. This research used qualitative paradigms with phenomenological approaches. Data were collected using observation, interview and documentation techniques. Data analysis uses interactive analysis of Miles and Huberman's models. The results showed that the humanistic approach in elementary school inclusion programmes succeeded in developing the learning independence of students with disabilities by up to 80%. Strategies for developing humanistic approaches are carried out with biological approaches by developing the curriculum independently and creating a pleasant learning atmosphere.

Keywords: Learning, independence learning, disabled students, humanist, humanistic approaches

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1. Introduction

Education is the right of all children. Among these educational rights is the opportunity to learn to develop potential (Mikkonen et al., 2020). All children with various conditions have the right to get optimal education (Murris, 2019; Osher et al., 2020). Barriers preventing students with special needs from obtaining educational rights must be removed (Hassani & Schwab, 2021). Not all children are born under normal conditions; some children are born in abnormal conditions physically and non-physically. Although children are born abnormally, they still have the right to education as normal children. Efforts to seriously fight for the right to education for children with disabilities have been made by the World Education Forum. In 2000, the World Education Forum based in Dakar, Senegal, urged that the 'Education for All' (EFA) programme be achieved by 2015. Similar demands by the EFA movement also encourage the fulfilment of education for children with physical and mental disabilities into the mainstream (Onyesom & Igberaharha, 2021). Among the forms of scholarly attention is allocating sufficient funds to fulfil educational rights. Western countries and South Africa also give funds for children's education, especially primary education (Murris, 2019). Hassani and Schwab's (2021) study found that in Austria more than half of the students with special needs study in regular schools. Their parents can decide whether they will send their child to a regular school or a school for students with special needs.

The emergence of COVID-19 has changed various aspects of human life, not least in education. The influence of COVID-19 is not only in education, but the economic part globally is also undergoing many changes (Espada-Chavarria et al., 2021). The school, as one of the formal educational institutions, is changing. During a pandemic, learning in schools cannot be implemented optimally due to limited study time (Lister et al., 2021; Osher et al., 2020; Zaien, 2021). We have learned that the method of direct interaction between teachers and students has been turned into indirect interaction because of the enactment of social restrictions and physical restrictions. This condition encourages schools to organise online learning (Lister et al., 2021).

Online learning is related to teacher readiness, student readiness, learning devices and the availability of Internet access. The results of Andarwulan et al.'s (2021) research concluded that teachers are not ready to implement online learning policies. During the pandemic, when the students studied at home, several teachers applied different learning according to student conditions (Kast et al., 2021).

1.1. Theoretical framework

Humanistic approaches can develop the attitude of independence in children with disabilities (Finkel & Danby, 2019). Arlinwibowo et al.'s (2021) study, in Indonesia, generally mentions many disability groups. Therefore, the ability to accompany teachers in taking a humane approach to students with special needs (disabilities) is needed in the development of the knowledge of independence of students with disabilities because the ability to live independently and not be dependent on others is one of the essential goals for students with disabilities. Classroom teachers and accompanying teachers must adapt quickly to the learning environment in pandemic times to optimise learning outcomes. Although the primary purpose of education is to humanise humans, humane learning is still very minimal (Merce,2021).

1.2. Related research

Students with disabilities need extra assistance in learning and development of independence. As a dynamic institution, higher education must be inclusive. The inclusive nature includes providing opportunities to people with disabilities (Andreou et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2019;

Lister et al., 2021). Related to meeting the needs of students with disabilities, the Board of Governors of European Schools makes policies to optimise accessibility, availability of accommodation, curriculum adaptation for students with disabilities and tailor programmes in universities to support the development of a more sustainable, inclusive, green and digital academic atmosphere (Andreou et al., 2021).

In schools that accept students in the rehabilitation of the classroom, teachers need the help of a companion teacher. According to Andreou et al. (2021), higher education must be inclusive as a dynamic institution. Children with special needs have not been humanely enforced. Many studies to date have found that human interaction is not only related to human relationships with fellow humans but even interactions with animals need to be done humanely (Finkel & Danby, 2019). The experience in Europe can be an excellent example of handling children with special needs. The Board of Governors of European Schools has dramatically changed the policy for students with special needs (Andreou et al., 2021).

Learning cannot take place optimally during a pandemic. Learning at the elementary and intermediate levels had generally worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. This condition relatively improved when students with disabilities entered higher education (Espada-Chavarria et al., 2021). The provincial government of the Special Region of Yogyakarta once made a policy to recruit several companion teachers to help classroom teachers in several schools that included inclusion programmes (Arlinwibowo et al., 2021). In an era of rapidly evolving digital transformation, it is important to develop a curriculum that aligns with students' interests and abilities. The application of a single curriculum that is intended for all students is already less relevant (Viana & Peralta, 2021).

1.3. Problem and Purpose of the study

The main problem in this study is how to optimise the learning independence of students with special needs in elementary schools. This research aims to describe and analyse the implementation of humanistic approaches in increasing the independence of students with special needs. The research was conducted at Purba Adhi Suta Purbalingga Elementary School, Central Java, Indonesia. This school is a reference school for disabled students in Purbalingga and surrounding areas. In 2015, Purbalingga Regency of Central Java Province, Indonesia, had a school for children with special needs; there are five elementary schools, consisting of four state elementary schools and one private elementary school.

2. Method

2.1. Research design

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), there are three research approaches: qualitative, quantitative and mixed. This research used a qualitative design (Harrison et al., 2020). Qualitative research was selected using phenomenological approaches (Berghofer, 2020).

2.2. Data sources and informants

The research data were sourced from the principal, vice principal, class teachers and accompanying teachers. There are 15 class teachers; through purposive sampling, 1 teacher from grade 3 and 1 teacher from grade 6 were selected. All eight accompanying teachers from grades 3 to 6 were selected through purposive sampling. The purposive selection of samples was based on grouping classes into low grades (grades 1–3) and high grades (4–6). The selection of grade 3 as a representation of the lower class and grade 6 as the higher class was based on the results of the researcher's discussion with the school leadership. The number of third graders is as many as 41

children and sixth graders are as many as 28 children.

Table 1. Informants and Code

No	Type of informant	Initial	Code
1	Principal	JSD	P
2	Deputy Principal	STY	DP
3	3rd Grade Teacher	DDO	TE-3
4	6th Grade Teacher	LEY	TE-6
5	Companion Teacher 3.1	RIN	CT.3.1
6	Companion Teacher 3.2	WAP	CT.3.2
7	Companion Teacher 3.3	KRS	CT.3.3
8	Companion Teacher 3.4	SEL	CT.3.4
9	Companion Teacher 6.1	ANA	CT.6.1
10	Companion Teacher 6.2	IYA	CT.6.2
11	Companion Teacher 6.3	NZA	CT.6.3
12	Companion Teacher 6.4	PRI	CT.6.4

2.3. Data collection techniques

Data were collected using in-depth interviews, observation and documentation techniques. In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal, vice principal, class teachers and accompanying teachers. Observations were carried out directly at the time of learning using non-participants. Documentation techniques are used to collect data related to the development of student learning outcomes. Data validation was carried out by triangulation of sources and techniques.

2.4. Data analysis

The data collected were analysed with Mile and Huberman's interactive models. The analysis begins with data reduction, display and conclusion/verification. Data reduction was conducted by presenting the primary data after being selected and sorted from all the collected data. Data display was carried out by giving data narratively to make it easier to describe a phenomenon. Conclusion/verification was carried out by systematically focusing on data and then inducting interpreted data to obtain meaning (Lertora & Croffie, 2020; Rahmawati et al., 2020; Y Hairun et al., 2020). The process of data analysis is shown in Figure 1.
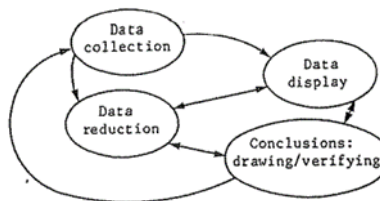

Figure 1. Data Analysis Process

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Home visits during a pandemic

Based on the interviews with principals and classroom teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, all schools did not conduct face-to-face learning. Learning was conducted online. Because students with disabilities need special assistance, the Head of Purba Elementary School, Adhi Suta, decided to teach by visiting the students' homes. Home visits were made by a companion teacher every Monday and Wednesday (twice a week) (P and DP).

Before visiting the student's home, the accompanying teacher coordinates with the class teacher about the learning material students must deliver and learn. Based on interviews with companion teachers, it is not always possible for students to learn according to the predetermined targets during home visits. Companion teachers often accompany students to carry out personal activities such as eating, playing and cleaning themselves. This condition does not disappoint the companion teacher because, for students with disabilities, the main target is not based on the goals and learning materials (TE-3, TE-6, CT.3.1 and CT.6.1).

3.2. Human approach

Schools have built a biological closeness between teachers and students. This effort begins with the teacher and companion teacher warmly welcoming students' arrival at the school gate. Children who leave school are escorted by parents, family members or helpers to the school gate. While studying in the classroom, the companion teacher stands or sits next to the student. When students work on exercises and assignments given by the classroom teacher, the accompanying teacher always accompanies the students who have difficulty approaching and being guided to work on activities and complete projects (P, DP, CT.3.2 and CT.6.1).

3.3. Developing a self-contained curriculum

School managers develop the curriculum independently by modifying the education unit-level curriculum. Objectives, materials, methods and assessments are tailored to students' abilities, i.e., adjustments are made by school managers by lowering the main components of the curriculum. The curriculum is tailored to students' knowledge so that in a class, there are several variations. For example, as an overview, in the goals and learning materials of sixth-grade students there can be three variations. The first variation of the curriculum is derived from one level (equivalent to grade 5); the second variation of the curriculum is lowered by two groups (equivalent to grade 4); and the third variation is reduced by three levels (equivalent to grade 3). Teaching methods have applied a combination of classical and individual methods. At the beginning of the classroom teaching–learning by explaining the subject matter classically, the companion teacher approaches the students to check whether the student has understood or not; if the student has not understood, then the companion teacher explains and accompanies the student to understand (TE-6, CT.6.1 and TE.6.2).

To measure students' learning outcomes, formative and summative assessments are carried out, i.e., formative assessments in the form of daily repeats and mid-term tests. Daily replays are carried out after the teacher completes a particular topic. The teacher carries the mid-term assessment after learning for about 10 weeks. A summative evaluation is conducted at the end of the semester to measure a student's learning success over the length of a semester.

The assessment used observation and test techniques. Classroom teachers and companion teachers used observation techniques to measure the attitude and skills during the learning process. Test techniques are carried out to measure the aspects of knowledge. Before implementing the mid-semester and final semester tests, the class teacher and the accompanying teacher conducted exercises so that the implementation of the trial took place orderly and smoothly.

The types of tests used were mainly true/false, matching and multiple choice. For the fill-

in/completion type test provided with an answer choice, the student selects the correct answer and writes in the place provided. The companion teacher controls the student and assists if needed at the test time. Graduation standards average 50% of the ability of regular students (P, DP, TE-3 and TE-6).

Final assessment results show that more than 80% of the students achieved minimum completion criteria on attitudes and skills by focusing on students' ability to be independent. In general, 75% of the students learned independently, especially in reading, writing and counting. Although the average achievement is below the ability of students who have normal skills, some students achieve high academic achievements and continue to high school (P and DP).

3.4. Fun learning application

Classroom teachers and companion teachers collaborate to create a fun classroom learning atmosphere. Examples are simply given for complex learning materials. Singing is used to make it easier for the material to be memorised and remembered. Not enforcing the same learning outcome in a class, students are given individual discretion. To train students, the school prepares student worksheets with writing printed with connected dots so that students just connect the points that have been provided (P, TE-3 and TE-6).

By the time learning is over, the students are picked up to go home, but some students show less joy. When the companion teachers were interviewed, they explained that parents of students lock up the children with disabilities at home (placed in rooms and locked) on the ground so as not to disturb or damage and to be ashamed of neighbours or the surrounding environment.

Each student is provided with one table and one chair individually. This condition is different from regular students, where one table can be used for two students. Single tables and chairs can minimise students bothering other students. Classroom teachers manage students by observing the student's ability level. Students who can capture the teacher's explanation are placed in the front row, while students who have less ability are placed in the back row (TE-3 and TE-6).

At the beginning of school, the class teacher observes the students' ability to capture the teacher's explanation. Classroom teachers use data based on recommendations from psychologists for grades 1 and 2, and for grade 6 to refer to previous class teacher's information. Students who can capture explanations are already relatively well placed in the front seat.

Students whose ability to capture explanations is somewhat lacking are placed in the back row. Accompanying teachers were students who had less ability. The accompanying teacher sits next to the student, looking and asking (if needed) whether he already knew what to do or not. If the student does not know, the accompanying teacher explains more elaborately. After the student understands what to do, the teacher accompanies the student to work. If the student has difficulty, the accompanying teacher helps do the task given by the class teacher. If the child does not want to work slowly, the accompanying teacher does so. After being persuaded not to work, the accompanying teacher does not force students to work (CT.3.2 and CT.6.2).

The results of observations in the field are categorised into three: (1) students are willing to work after being given a companion teacher's explanation and work on the task until it is completed; (2) students are willing to work after being given a companion teacher's explanation and do the task, but it is not finished (not willing to complete); (3) some students are still unwilling to work until the lesson is finished (CT.3.3 and CT.6.3).

The accompanying teacher does not force students to do assignments if, indeed, they do not want to be scolded, given punishment and so on. It is essential that students are comfortable and do not

disturb their friends.

An observation in the field is that the accompanying teacher helps the student eat (food or snacks brought from home). In some cases, the child of the accompanying teacher feeds the student. Another observation in the field is that the companion teachers help students to wash their hands, go to the toilet and to defecate or urinate. In some cases, the accompanying teachers help clean up after urinating or defecating. An observation in the field, in general, is that students feel comfortable and orderly in the classroom. Students' achievement of learning goals varies greatly. Some students can learn and achieve learning goals; some are only partially completed; others do not want to know and are busy with their activities. Classroom teachers and companion teachers do not force learning if students do not want to learn (CT.3.3 and CT.6.2).

An observation in the classroom during learning is that the companion teacher approaches and observes students with disabilities. If they have difficulty helping the companion teacher, they can carry out the tasks themselves; the companion teacher allows students to do the class teacher's task according to his/her ability. Mentoring is done randomly and alternately so that students do not experience dependence on certain companion teachers (TE-6, CT.3.4 and CT.6.2). For students to be motivated to study more diligently, the teacher gives gifts to students. The gifts given are simple, such as stationery (ballpoint, pencil and eraser), snacks and simple toys (TE-3, CT.3.3 and CT.3.4).

3.5. Learn independently

The ratio of helping the students is adjusted to the needs of students, and if students need extra handling, the mentoring ratio is that one companion teacher handles one student. If the handling is not too additional, one teacher handles two students; and if the handling is not heavy/light, one companion teacher takes three students. In principle, the concept of mentoring is carried out following the field conditions and helping each other in the learning process.

One of the companion teachers who has 12 assisted special needs students, Rin said that 'student mentoring in the early days of school is more like Baby Sister. Companion Teacher involvement is close to 100%. Companion teachers not only help students learn but also help students eat, accompany and clean when they urinate and defecate at school'. The higher the class (level) of the students, the lower the level of student dependence on the companion teacher. Among the sixth graders, in general, 80% of the students can already learn on their own (CT.3.1). The same statement was made by Iya, one of the companion teachers who had been accompanying students for 4 years. He said that 'the dependence of children in the lower classes (grades 1–3) to the companion teacher is very high; conversely, in the high class (grades 4–6) students are not greatly reduced dependence on the companion teacher' (CT.6.2).

Several adjustments were made, which are as follows:

1. Learning components such as learning objectives, materials and strategies are individualised and not devoted to achieving the student's level (class). There are sixth graders who are still not fluent in reading and writing.

2. Applying the principle of 'no students staying class' or each year of 'up-class' lessons even though it has not reached the minimum limit of each level.

3. There is no coercion in structured learning, and there are some students who, despite coming to school, do not follow the learning until they go home on their activities (CT-3, CT-6, CP.3.2 and CP.6.4).

The results of the interviews with several companion teachers showed that the implementation of mentoring strategies has a positive effect on two things. The first influence increases student

socialisation and the second reduces students' dependence on certain companion teachers.

4. Discussion

4.1. Special attention to children with disabilities

Students with disabilities need extra help in learning. This is due to the lack of physical and mental planning and implementation of learning specifically (Andreou et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2019; Lister et al., 2021). The population of students with disabilities is quite a lot in the world. For example, Japan, in 2011, had about 159,000 children with intellectual disabilities and about 78,000 children with physical disabilities. When associated with children under 18, students with disabilities reached 1.1% (Ejiri & Matsuzawa, 2019).

According to the World Bank, according to the latest data in 2020, there are q billion people, or 15% of the world's population, experiencing some form of disability. The prevalence of disability is higher in developing countries. Of these, about one-fifth of the global total, or between 110 million and 190 million people, have significant disabilities (Hidayat, 2021).

By referring to data on the number of students with disabilities, who are about 1% of all regular students, an inevitability of each country is that they should pay serious attention to the handling of students with disabilities, especially in education. If people with disabilities can be properly educated, they will be independent and not burden others.

4.2. Independence of learning

Schools generally focus learning on learners' mastery of subjects. Lately, many teachers and education policymakers have realised that mastery of the non-academic competence of learners plays an important role in preparing students for their future success (Hassani & Schwab, 2021). One of the goals of learning is for students to have learning independence (Marwiji & Mariah, 2021; Siagian et al., 2020; Sobri et al., 2020; Tasaik & Tuasikal, 2018). Learning independence affects learning outcomes, and to improve students' learning outcomes, learning must be directed to increase students' learning independence (Laksana & Hadijah, 2019). Student learning independence is a change in student behaviour to solve individual problems experienced without outside encouragement and help. There are several models, approaches, strategies and learning media that teachers have developed to increase students' learning independence, which includes doing home visits (Deden Herman, 2022), strengthening the role of parents (Fitria et al., 2021), application of a discovery learning model (Fithriyah et al., 2021), increased discipline and optimisation of self-regulation (Purwaningsih & Herwin, 2020), development of GeoGebra-assisted video media (Nuritha & Tsurayya, 2021), application of a flipped classroom learning model (Widodo et al., 2021) and the application of an interpersonal communication approach with students (Marwiji & Mariah, 2021).

4.3. Humanistic approach to learning

Humanistic learning is based on students' experiences, motives, interests and values (Mercer, 2021). A humanistic approach is an approach in learning geared towards providing assistance and guidance to students to develop their fundamental interests optimally (Fajriyah et al., 2021). Some research shows that the application of humanistic approaches through language educative games is proven to give a pleasant impression so that students' learning processes and outcomes are achieved more optimally (Wahyuningsih et al., 2021). The humanistic approach positively affects students' mathematical problem-solving abilities (Suhandri et al., 2021). In religious education, the humanistic approach is in harmony with religious education as it optimises the potential that God bestows to become a spiritual human being (Fadilah & Hamami, 2021). At the college level, the existential

humanistic approach of positive, cooperative learning has been shown to help less confident students become more confident (Napisah & Akbar, 2021).

Children with disabilities should be treated humanely. Students with disabilities have physical and non-physical limitations. This condition certainly affects the learning process. The learning process of disabled students is generally slower. Still, if the teacher or companion can provide a substantial boost and emphasise the side of excellence, students with disabilities can achieve achievement. Education aims to humanise humans so that the approach is made. The humane approach is made with a physical approach by creating a pleasant learning atmosphere and rewarding the achievements that have been achieved (Mercer, 2021). Giving gifts will increase learning motivation and be a nice response, positively affecting the repetition of an activity.

4.4. Home visits during the COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools did not organise direct learning but it was conducted online (Lister et al., 2021; Osher et al., 2020; Zaien, 2021). Optimisation of learning during the pandemic times was by making home visits. Volunteer visits to children during the pandemic developed a positive long-term relationship with the children (Jones & Westlake, 2021). Optimal cooperation between parents who have children with disabilities and teachers has been practised in several places. In Saudi, special education teachers actively and effectively communicate with parents who have children with disabilities. The teachers make home visits to familiarise children with disabilities and their parents (Almalki et al., 2021). The humane approach applied by accompanying teachers can help students with disabilities. Companion teachers perform mentoring, so students do not rely on particular escorts. Assistance, in turn, will also improve the child's social development.

4.5. Independent curriculum development

The curriculum covers at least three aspects: (a) the curriculum as an idea; (b) implementation of the curriculum in learning; and (c) the curriculum as a student experience. By referring to these three aspects, teachers and curriculum developers have an essential role in planning and implementing the curriculum. The curriculum will be easier to implement if carefully designed with the interests and circumstances of students in mind (Ching et al., 2019; Van Den Beemt et al., 2020). The curriculum must be developed and adapted to technological developments. The curriculum must also equip students with beneficial skills for their lives (Widiaty et al., 2020). Curriculum development of affective, behavioural, cognitive, and skills aspects is geared towards the continuous development of students' competencies (Waltner et al., 2019). Curriculum development independently is joint especially in schools with students who have limitations. Educational institutions usually adjust learning with those who know by providing learning activities outside formal learning (Hewett et al., 2017). In the era of digital transformation, individual curriculum development is inevitable. The curriculum that is built and developed at a certain time, including content, themes, materials and student activities, can no longer be applied single and equally to all students. The characteristics of students who have diverse interests, abilities and learning speed demand a diverse curriculum, leading to individual development (Viana & Peralta, 2021). If students who have normal abilities only need curriculum services individually, then students with disabilities need an individual curriculum to optimise the development of their potential.

5. Conclusion and recomendations

A humanistic approach in schools that accept students with disabilities can accelerate students' learning independence. At the high-grade level (grades 4–6), students' learning independence reaches 80%. The principle of a humanistic approach in developing the independence of students with disabilities is to consider the inability of students as human beings who can be independent if the proper assistance

is given. Curriculum components like objectives, materials, methods and assessments need to be developed and flexibly tailored to the individual abilities of learners. Implementing the curriculum in learning is done by developing a humanistic approach through a biological approach and creating a pleasant learning atmosphere.

Parents and family members need to develop a humane attitude in the family environment by applying the principle that children with special needs can develop learning independence if treated humanely. More research is needed to duplicate the application of humanistic approaches in family and social environments.

6. Acknowledgements

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