Self Adaptation for Children with Learning Disorders

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Abstract. Students with learning difficulties need special treatment to help them to achieve the optimum result in their study. However, their special needs are often neglected by public schools, in these schools they are treated as normal children. The failure to fulfill the needs of these special students will cause learning difficulties and low achievement.

The research was conducted at some elementary schools which were classified by the local department of education office as elementary schools with the lowest rank, these schools are located in Depok sub-district of Sleman, Yogyakarta. The subjects of this study were 52 students with learning disorder. The procedures for the subject sampling were: (1) Searched information from the local office of department of national education about the existence and information of the lowest-rank elementary school in Depok, Sleman, Yogyakarta. (2) Chose the schools that would be used as the subjects of the research. (3) Used the student’s learning disorder identification instrument. (4) Administered the CPM intelligence test from Raven.

The research subjects were comprised of 36 male students and 16 female students, the average age was 11 years old. The IQ score (in percentile) was 72.143 for male with SD 15.892 while the female students’ IQ score was 75.682 and 12.459 on the SD. All of the research subjects suffered from learning disorder which include: (1) general learning disorder 76.92%; (2) language comprehension disorder 71.15%; (3) language expression disorder 21.15%; (4) reading disorder 75.0 %; (5) writing disorder 50.0%; (6) arithmetic disorder 38.46%; (7) orientation disorder 3.85%; (8) motor disorder 17.31%; (9) attention and concentration disorder 42.31%; (10) emotional and behavioral disorder 25.0% and, (11) communication disorder 9.62%.

The result of the study showed that the controversial nomination was the most prevalent nomination of all with 14 students or 26.9 % showing controversial nomination, this was followed by 13 average students (25.0%), 11 rejected students (21.2%), 8 neglected students (15.4%), and 6 popular students (11.5%). The nomination comparisons among male students were: 11 controversial students, 8 rejected students, 8 average students, 4 neglected students, and 3 popular students. While on the female side, there were 5 average students, 4 neglected students, 3 rejected students, 3 controversial students, and 3 popular students.

Key words: self adaptation, learning disorders, neglected students, popular students, controversial students.
Elementary education is the stepping-stone to higher education, in elementary school students are trained with the mastery of basic skills, which include both general and academic skill, which will be crucial in the mastery of the more advanced skills later on. Students at elementary level required more attention because in this level students begin their conceptual and character building phase. Thus, the successful achievement of students in their later study will depend on their mastery of the basic skill.

Unfortunately, many students, especially elementary school students, fail to do their assignment due to their inadequate basic skill. Their inadequate mastery of basic skill is reflected from their imperfect mastery of some or all school subjects, which in turn lead to insufficient learning achievement. These students are prone to receive a class promotion or even drop out. These students are often classified as children with special need. The rate of students who failed to get promotion in elementary school was 13.1% while the drop out reached 28% (Department of National Education/Depdiknas, 2001).

Students with learning difficulties need special treatment to help them to achieve the optimum result in their study. However, their special needs are often neglected by public schools, in these schools they are treated as normal children. The failure to fulfill the needs of these special students will cause learning difficulties and low achievement.

Learning achievement is determined both by the internal and external factors. The internal factor include physical and psychological factor, while the external factor consist of adaptation ability, peer acceptance and teacher’s attitude. Chapman (1998) stated, “Most of students with learning difficulties fail in school activity, the failure is caused by inadequate cognitive ability and other non-intellectual factors including teacher, peer and school”.

Ladd (1990) conducted one of the significant studies of school adaptation with learning achievement. In this research, Ladd showed the significant and positive contribution of successful adaptation in students learning achievement and performance. In her research, Utari (1988) as quoted by Sukarti (2003) showed the significant correlation between school adaptation and learning achievement. Students with successful adaptation usually performed better in their study, students performed better when they feel secure and happy. These favorable conditions gave them opportunity for self-actualization and encouraged them to study harder to achieve a better result. Students are said to adapt successfully in the school when they are able to show consideration for others, respect to others and participate actively in helping each other in school activity (Buhs & Ladd, 2001).

Successful school adaptation refers to the ideal condition where both the students and the school environment feel satisfy with the students’ attitude. The acceptance from school acceptance is imperative because self-satisfaction with their behavior is insufficient for successful adaptation. Students who fail in
school adaptation will feel depressed because of their inability to fulfill the social pressure to have a relationship with their group, to interact with the teacher as well as to participate in class activity. Failure in school adaptation will have negative impacts on students, Hurlock (1991) stated, “students will be unhappy and despise their own self, as the consequence, students begin to develop selfish, introvert, unsocial or even anti social attitudes. Without proper assistance, these attitudes will probably cause mental disturbances, failure to achieve optimum learning achievement and difficulties in further development. Ladd (1990) concluded that students with school adaptation difficulty also had higher level of anxiety and dependency on others, in addition to that they were also more volatile to failure and showing inferiority in front of their peers, and felt that their school assignments were to difficult.

In addition to school adaptation, peer acceptance is very instrumental in students learning achievement. Students learn about adaptation and try to adjust in society as well as other behavioral patterns from their peer. Peer acceptance is important because it is the reflection of group appreciation on individual. Experiences with peer will stimulate cognitive development, social skills as well as social cognition. Peer relationship can function as the medium to learn about social role, medium to increase moral maturity as well as to reduce egocentrism, it can also provide social support (Wentzel, 1998); peer relationship can ease the transition process of dependency to family to the more complicated life environment (Diehl, et al, 1998); finally peer acceptance also contribute to students’ perception, performance and adaptation in their school (Ladd, 1990).

Students with good peer acceptance showed better learning result, while peer rejection increases the risk of academic failure. Some of the characteristic of students with good peer acceptance are: confident in being his/her own self, enthusiastic in giving attention to others, high self-confident and happiness but not arrogant, communicate with better clarity, attractive and skillful in maintaining conversation (Kennedy in Santrock, 2002). Hurlock (1991) added friendliness, cooperativeness, law abiding, ability to adapt without causing friction, and ability to accept happily, whatever happens in his/her life. Other characteristics include ability to share, willingness to take turn in group play, responsible, willing to participate and enjoy social relationship, has a high social awareness and understanding. Students with good peer acceptance are also emotionally more mature, and have a better control in their behavior these students are also more calm, and free from anxiety, anger or jealously.

There are five categories of peer acceptance; they are: popular, rejected, neglected, controversial, and average (Wentzel, 1991). Popular means, many people are fond of this student; he/she is disliked by only few people. Controversial on the other refer to a situation in which a student is being liked by some people but he/she is also dislike by others. Average indicate that the acceptance is only mediocre but with no rejection. Neglected signify a condition when a
student is being sidelined socially, this type of student is often disliked by his/her peers, and this condition leave them with only very limited friends. While Rejected means that a student is disliked by the vast majority, this condition is marked with aggressive attitude, lack of self-control, anxiety as well as lack of social skill, withdrawal, and personal problem.

Another determining factor in the outcome of the learning process is teacher’s attitude towards the students, this is essential since teacher has a direct contribution in the teaching and learning process. When teachers shows their emphatic understanding on students’ condition, strengths, weaknesses and conducted the learning process based on individual differences, students will be more confident because teacher’s appreciation and understanding increase their self-perception as well as pride. On the other hand, students will be frustrated and lose their motivation in their study when teacher portray favoritism and lack of understanding, this condition will lead to unsatisfactory learning outcome. The combination of school adaptation, peer-acceptance, and teacher’s attitude together with inappropriate educational system will give negative impact on students’ learning achievement, and making them as underachievers.

Learning outcome was defined as the average student’s score from nine subjects in elementary school, which include Religion, PPKN (Civics), Indonesian, Mathematics, Social studies, Natural science, art and handicraft skill, sports, Javanese, and the art of traditional dance or English. The scores were obtained from the first semester 2003-2004 Student’s progress report.

School adaptation was defined as student’s ability in coping with the variety of social situation at school in an effective and responsible manner. Thus, he/she, in addition to self-satisfaction, may achieve a harmonious relationship with his/her surroundings. In this study, the aspects of school adaptation followed the concept from Coie but with modification (as stated in Buhs & Ladd, 2001). The aspects were: (1) Students’ obedience to school regulation, (2) students’ participation in school activity, (3) students’ participation and cooperation in group work, (4) students’ healthy and friendly relationship with their peers as well as with their teacher. The success rate of school adaptation was reflected from the score obtained from the school adaptation questionnaire. High score was a reflection of good and successful school adaptation while low score was an indication of low or unsuccessful school adaptation.

Peer acceptance was defined as a process in which a student as a member of one society or group was chosen by the group as friend and was allowed to participate in the group activity. For a student peer acceptance was an indicator of his/her successful role in the group, and it also showed the student was approved by fellow group members to work or to play together. Peer acceptance was measured using the sociometrical nomination consisting positive and negative nomination.
Teacher's attitude was categorized into favorable and unfavorable attitudes, included in these two attitudes were the cognition, affection and conation components of students' with learning disorder. There were four aspects teacher's attitudes (1) the awareness of students' individual biological, intellectual, and psychological differences; (2) The ability to recognize individual special ability in each student; (3) The willingness to encourage all students without showing like or dislike attitude; (4) The ability to understand students' unique condition in order to give an appropriate response to help students to increase their learning achievement. An understanding and favorable teacher usually scores a high point and was said to positive and favorable to students with learning disorder.

Finally, students with learning disorder were defined as students who faced difficulty in accomplishing their academic duty. Students with learning disorder were recognized from the below average score, and the inconsistency between IQ score and learning achievement. The disorder was visible from their lack of mastery on the basic academic skills (reading, writing, and arithmetic) as well as basic general skill (language comprehension and expression, motor disorder, attention and concentration disorder, emotional and behavioral disorder, and also communication disorder); all of these disorder were not cause by any physical or mental handicap.

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The data were obtained using questionnaires, there were two kinds of questionnaires, the first was questionnaire on school adaptation and teachers;
attitude, and the second questionnaire were designed to elicit data on the sociometric nomination of peer acceptance. There were 40 items in the first questionnaire and the index of item correlation was between 0.3228 – 0.5039 with an alpha coefficient of 0.8632. The second questionnaire consisted of 32 items, and the index of item correlation was between 0.3125 – 0.5247 with an alpha coefficient of 0.8557.

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A student became popular or being liked by others because of these following reasons: helpful to his/her friends, listen attentively, maintain communication, try to be him/her self, happy, enthusiastic and attentive to others, self-confident but not arrogant, diligent, clever, friendly, kind, polite, honest, loyal, helpful to parents, fair, loyal to friends, pacifist, gentle, modest, handsome/beautiful, attentive, energetic, swift, neat, good problem solver. Meanwhile, these were the reasons why someone was disliked: naughty, annoying, liar, lazy, stingy, bothering, cry-baby, grumpy, fuzzy, cheater, talkative during the lesson, lofty, vandalism, bossy, unhygienic, hypocrite, untruthful, selfish, stupid, slanderous, showing off one’s wealth, and a dishonest habit of copying another friend homework.

The result of double regression analysis showed that there was a very significant influence from school adaptation, peer acceptance, and teachers’ attitude with the learning achievement. The influence was observable from the F value of 12.265, R = 0.656, R² = 0.434 and p = 0.000. It can be inferred that when a student accomplished to adapt successfully he/she would also have a better or higher learning achievement. The above analysis also showed that a better peer acceptance also led to better learning achievement, and finally if a teacher acted in a more favorable way, the student would also have a better learning outcome. These analyses showed that all the three independent variable, school adaptation, peer acceptance, and teacher’s attitude influenced the learning achievement of students’ with learning disorder by 43.4 %.

The result of regression analysis using the stepwise model showed that teachers’ attitude was the most significant variable that determined the learning achievement with B value of 0.365 with p < 0.01 (p = 0.002). This analysis was then followed by the stepwise model of regression analysis towards the aspects in teachers’ attitude, the analysis showed that the most significant aspects of the
teacher attitude was the teachers' ability in understanding the special ability of each student, the significance was observable in the t value of 3.204 with \( p = 0.002 \) (\( p < 0.01 \)).

The result of simple regression analysis between school adaptation with learning achievement showed that learning achievement was significantly influenced by school adaptation, this was clearly visible from the \( R^2 = 0.241 \), \( R = 0.491 \), \( t = 3.980 \) with p value of 0.000. This value showed that school adaptation influenced the learning achievement by 24.1%. Peer acceptance was also instrumental in determining the learning outcome, this condition was represented by the \( R^2 \) value of 0.149, \( R = 0.386 \), \( t = 2.963 \) with \( p = 0.005 \). This value showed that peer acceptance influenced the learning achievement by 14.9%. Teachers' attitude was the other determining factor in learning achievement, this condition was signified by the \( R^2 \) value of 0.218, \( R = 0.467 \), \( t = 3.731 \) with \( p = 0.000 \). This condition showed that the learning achievement was influenced by teachers' attitude by 21.8%.

Learning achievement is determined both by the internal and external factors. The internal factor comes within the student which include physical and psychological factor. Physical factors include; the condition of all senses, body, nervous system, glands and inner organs of the body, while psychological factor include cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and personality. The external factor include the adaptation ability, peer acceptance and teacher's attitude.

It is not easy to adapt with the situation in a school, there are many students who fail to adjust themselves individually or socially. This condition will become even more difficult for students with learning disorder, they are at a high risk of being isolated socially, a situation that will make their life more difficult as they try to live up to the pressure to perform both in school and in society.

Many students with learning disorder failed to adapt in their school environment, these failure were observable from their improper attitude in the classroom, for example: they talked a lot during the class hour, they mocked other students, they broke the school law, and they also ignited a brawl with their peer. However, this failure didn't mean they were rejected at their school environment.

The difficulty to adapt successfully at school environment might be caused by several conditions. First, student would find it difficult to adapt at school if he/she had been developing a bad social behavioral pattern despite all the strong motivation given to the student. Second, student would find many difficulties to adapt at school if he/she was not provided with a role model whom they could emulate. Third, student's lack of motivation to try to adapt at the school might be caused by his/her bad first social experience at home or in the society. Fourth, the student despite having a high motivation was not given enough guidance or help in this learning process.
The result of peer acceptance nomination showed that most of the students with learning disorder received the controversial nomination, this result signified that these students were like by few but also dislike by some of their peers. This nomination put them in a critical position because if they had just one attitude that their peer didn’t fond of, they ran the risk of being demoted to lower acceptance level such as in neglected or even in rejected nomination. They could lose their peer approval when they did or said something wrong or inappropriate as those actions could make the other peers to go against them. This research also found out that students with learning disorder had a lower peer acceptance level compared to the normal students, and only few managed to get the popular rating. The controversial nomination that the students had forced them to try harder in their struggle for peer acceptance, when a student received peer acceptance, he/she would find an extra energy to study and to receive a better learning result.

Lack of peer acceptance experienced by students’ with learning disorder had made life in society very difficult for these students and it also brought unpleasant psychological disorder, Hurlock (1991) explained some of the psychological disorder that might aroused, including: (1) loneliness because of unsatisfied social needs, (2) feeling unhappy and insecure, (3) tendency to develop unpleasant self-concept that might lead to personal deviation, (4) lack of learning experience required in the process of socialization, (5) feeling very sad because of the failure the taste the happiness enjoyed by their peer, (6) often try to force their way into a group which in turn will cause even more resistance from the group and it will further decrease their chance to learn the social skills, (7) they will live in uncertainty in term of the social reaction they might receive, and this will lead to anxiety, fear, and highly sensitive person, (8) they will over doing their adaptation process in hope of increasing their social acceptance.

Teachers play an important role because they are the symbol of authority; they dictate the class atmosphere, and the interaction condition among students as well as creating the true and meaningful role of the students. Experts on psychology and education have tried to create a personality profile of a good teacher, however, the complexity of personality, education and learning as well as individual differences have made it difficult. Nevertheless, there have been some behavior and attitude from a teacher that have been associated with positive learning outcome, some of them are the existence of enthusiasm, the ability to plan, the ability to adapt, the ability to stay calm, warm, flexible, and aware of individual differences as well as an awareness of students’ unique and special talent.

A good teacher should be able to create a sense of industry instead of low self esteem on the students. A good teacher is trustworthy and respected by his/her students, a good teacher should also appreciate individual differences, act without discrimination, he/she should be ready in assisting students who face
problem in their study, create a setting in which students will feel positively about themselves and a good teacher should be able to deal with students who underplay the importance of school. Although, teacher’s characteristic and style are important, they must be adjusted with the condition of the students.

Teacher’s attitude in the class will influence the interaction among students. The interaction will increase if the teacher introduces learning activity, takes role, and delivers the material based on students’ ability. The interaction will also increase if the teacher provides a customized teaching and learning services based on students’ talents, interest, and needs. This means the interaction between teacher and students will also serves as a model for the other students. A fair and just teacher will appreciate all the strengths as well as the weaknesses of the students, he/she will be aware of the students’ needs and in predicting students’ success in learning.

A teacher of students with learning disorder is required to understand that students with learning disorder also have special talent. Their specialty despite their learning disorder is paramount in their achievement in sports, arts, and etc. It is important for a teacher to appreciate the special talent in every student because with the correct reward students will be motivated to increase their achievement. Every student has his/her own strength, the same is also true with student who suffers from learning disorder, for example there was a student with learning disorder who faced problem in mathematics but was very successful in sports, or other who had difficulty in reading but was triumphant in sports and etc.

A teacher is more than just a teaching staff, a protector or a servant who serves others’ need for special education. A teacher is required to have a reliable competency. There are two competencies that a teacher must possesses, they are: technical and collaborative competencies. Technical competency include: competency in understanding various theory on learning disorder, as well as understanding in various tests related with learning disorder, skillful in administering assessment and evaluation, skillful in teaching spoken and written language, reading, mathematics, behavioral management and expert in providing pre-vocational and vocational education. Collaborative consultancy competency refers to the ability to forge a relationship among related parties.

A multidisciplinary treatment must also be given to students’ with learning disorder especially treatment which is related to their educational and teaching programs, these treatment will involve doctor, psychologist, orthopedagogist, teacher,therapist, and parents. The involvement of doctor, psychologist, orthopedagogist is important especially in the assessment process and in the process of designing the individual service program. While teacher and therapist will be the front men in the implementation of the intervention program designed to provide special services to every student with learning disorder. Parents are the source of information that can play the role in helping students
with their home activity in conjunction with the individual program that has been discussed and approved by the school.

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