

Parents' Roles in Overcoming Elementary Students' Learning Difficulties

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Aug 13, 2018

Revised Sep 2, 2018

Accepted Oct 12, 2018

Keyword:

Parents' roles

Learning difficulties

Elementary school

ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify learning problems and the parents' roles in overcoming learning difficulties of 5th-grade students of Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School, Bantul, Yogyakarta. Research participants were six students with learning difficulties, six parents, and four teachers. Selection of subjects used purposive sampling technique. Research object was the parents' roles in overcoming students' learning difficulties. This research was a qualitative research with data collection techniques in the form of observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis technique was the interactive model (data collection, data reduction, data models, and drawing conclusions). Triangulation is used as a method of data validation. The results showed that the problems experienced by students with learning difficulties in Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School were lower than average learning outcomes, slow understanding, and lack of reasonable attitudes, behavior, and emotional symptoms during the learning process. The parents' roles in overcoming students' learning difficulties included: finding tutoring institutions for children, accompanying children when coming and going home from school, being good listeners, accompanying learning activities at home, taking children on the first day of school, meeting with teachers through parents association, and present at the distribution of learning outcomes report card.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Learning in elementary school can be divided into learning in lower classes and higher classes. Learning in the lower classes emphasizes concrete learning, in which students learn through facts or real things around them. Learning in higher classes, especially in 5th grade, is a learning process that summarizes and deepens the subject matter of the previous levels or classes.

Learning in 5th grade should be more focused on preparation for the next level or class. In this grade students will face the final examination for graduation. The development of elementary school students is in the concrete operational stage (1st - 5th grades) and formal operational stage (6th grade), which have the learning tendency of concrete, integrative, and hierarchical. Grade 5 is the final stage of the concrete operational stage, and 6th grade is the initial stage of the formal operational [1,2].

According to the pattern of cognitive development from Piaget, it showed that children of 7-11 years old will enter the concrete operational stage, i.e. starting to be faced with real [3,4]. Based on this opinion, it is clear that learning in 5th grade has a quality of concrete operational, in which students learn from the real

things around them to understand a concept. Learning in 5th grade is also a preparation for students to enter the next development stage, i.e. the formal operational stage.

Facts in the field showed that in 5th grade there are obstacles in the learning process. One of them is the occurrence of learning difficulties. Learning difficulties are the brain's inability caused by internal factors (brain dysfunction) not due to external factors (social, cultural, learning facilities, etc.) [5,6]. Learning difficulties are a group of disorders that affect academic and functional abilities, such as the ability to speak, read, write, and organize information. Preliminary studies in the field showed that there are still many cases of learning difficulties experienced by 5th-grade students in elementary schools, especially in the Special Province of Yogyakarta. The forms of learning difficulties being observed in this research are obstacles in the understanding subject matter or organizing information, low verbal abilities due to lack of confidence, reading difficulties, learning difficulties in mathematics, and difficulty in writing [7]. The cause of this learning difficulties is mostly due to the students' low motivation in learning [8,9]. Learning motivation is mostly influenced by external factors, i.e. the support of the students' learning environment.

Overcoming learning difficulties is not only the teachers' responsibility but also the parents' responsibility. Barr & Saltmarsh stated that parental involvement in learning assistance affects their children's success in school [10]. Parents should provide learning facilities, supervise learning activities, monitor learning time, find out learning difficulties, and help overcome these difficulties. The ways that parents do to overcome students' learning difficulties are different. There are parents who provide full facilities, some are indifferent or not pay any attention to students' learning difficulties. In addition, there are parents who actively communicate and exchange information with teachers to overcome students' learning difficulties, there are also parents who completely rely on the teachers to overcome these learning difficulties.

Parents are not only entitled to want to their children obtain good learning outcomes but also have an obligation to help students overcome learning difficulties. This is the reason for needing a study on collaboration or division of roles between parents and teachers in overcoming students' learning difficulties. This article will present the research result on the importance of parents' roles in overcoming learning difficulties of elementary school students, especially 5th-grade students of Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School, Bantul, Yogyakarta.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Participants in this research were six 5th grade students of Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School who had learning difficulties. Subject determination is based on the identification of student learning difficulties. Participant selection was conducted by purposive sampling technique. Subjects are students who have learning difficulties problem, then their parents are also be a participant because he/she is a key source in this study, classroom teachers are considered to know the learning problems of student as well as connecting between students and their parents. Based on information by the classroom teacher, there were six students who had learning difficulties and were supported by information from academic tests. In addition to them, the participants in this research were parents of students with learning difficulties, and also teachers. Teachers who participated in the study were 5th-grade teachers, Arabic language teachers, teachers of Muhammadiyah studies, and special mentoring teachers at Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School. The research was conducted at Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School, Banguntapan, Bantul, Yogyakarta.

Data collection techniques used in this study were observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations and documentation were used to obtain data about the learning difficulties of 5th-grade students of Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School. Interviews were used to obtain data about the parents' roles in overcoming learning difficulties of 5th-grade students in Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School.

Data validity techniques in this study were technic triangulation and source triangulation. Technic triangulation was used to determine the validity of the data about learning difficulties of 5th-grade students in Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School. The techniques used were observation, documentation, and interviews. Source triangulation was used to find the data about the parents' roles in overcoming learning difficulties of 5th-grade students in Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School. Source triangulation was done by in-depth interviews with students, parents, and teachers. Data were analyzed by interactive model or data analysis model of Miles and Huberman with the stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on observations, documentation, and interviews, there are several learning difficulties of 5th-grade students in Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School. These difficulties are lower than average learning outcomes, the achievement are not corresponded with the efforts that have been done, slow in doing learning activities, the existence of attitudes and behavior that are not natural, and the existence of unreasonable emotional symptoms. The results of interviews with students, parents, and teachers showed that there are several roles that have been carried out optimally and several roles that have not been done maximally. The roles that have been done maximally is looking for tutoring institutions for children, habituate to saying goodbye before go out, picking up children from school, being a good listener, accompanying learning activities at home, taking children on the first day of school, meeting with teachers through parents association, and present at report card distribution. The roles that have not been done or not yet maximized is contacting the doctor for an initial diagnosis, cooperate with special education programs, form a unified team in the family, communicate with other families, and accompany children while watching television.

3.1. Learning Problems in 5th grade of Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School

There are behavioral characteristics in students who have learning difficulties [11]. These characteristics are lower than average learning outcomes, the achievement are not corresponded with the efforts that have been done, slow in doing learning activities, the existence of attitudes and behavior that are not natural, and the existence of unreasonable emotional symptoms. These characteristics are used as guidelines for observation and documentation to find out the learning difficulties in 5th-grade students of Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School.

3.1.1. Lower than Average Learning Outcomes

Lower than average learning outcomes is indicated by the students' scores on several subjects that not yet achieved the minimum criteria (passing grade), or lower than 75 score. The six students who experienced learning difficulties obtained lower than average learning outcomes in the thematic subject. In addition, the six students who experienced learning difficulties also obtained lower than average learning outcomes in mathematics assessment at the end of the odd semester. Example of the average mathematics learning outcomes of the six students is 24,4; 35; 26,9; 29,4; 31,3; and 43,75 from a scale of 100.

3.1.2. The achievement are not corresponded with the efforts that have been done

Achievement are not corresponded with the efforts that have been done is indicated by two indicators. The first indicator is that students take lessons well, but difficult to understand the subject matter. The second indicator is that students can complete the task but not match to the task criteria requested. An example is students being calm in learning, but needing a re-explanation in doing the practice questions. Students often ask to be explained again in answering practice questions because they do not understand the point of the problems presented.

3.1.3. Slow in learning activities

Slow learning activities are indicated by the indicator of students need a longer time to do tasks than students in general. Example of observation that showed this indicator is when working on a midterm remedial question, students who experience learning difficulties require a longer time to complete the task. Students who experience learning difficulties also seem to lack in understanding the point of the problems.

3.1.4. The Existence of attitudes and behavior that are not natural

Based on the results of observation, attitudes and behaviors that are less normal are indicated by four indicators. The first indicator is that students often come late or skip classes. The second indicator is that students often not doing assignments. The third indicator is that students often make disturbance both inside and outside the classroom. The fourth indicator is students who have learning difficulties are difficult to work in a team.

3.1.5. The Existence of unreasonable emotional symptoms

Observation results showed that there are three indicators of the existence of unreasonable emotional symptoms on students who have learning difficulties. The first indicator is that students often look moody. The second indicator is that students easily get irritated and offended. The third indicator is that students do not show regret when getting low scores.

Related to learning difficulties in slow learner students, indicators of learning difficulties as described previously are also in accordance with the understanding of slow learner. Based on the opinion of

some experts, slow learner is the student who is slow in the learning process so that it takes longer than other students to have the same level of intellectual potential [12–14]. Based on the description of the observation results, slow learners students are often experiencing delays in the learning process.

Based on the observations results, and also supported by interviews, students who experience verbal learning difficulties are difficult to express opinions or have difficulties in terms of communication. Students who have verbal learning difficulties also claim to have difficulties in subjects related to language, for example English, which certainly requires verbal skills. Despite experiencing verbal learning difficulties, several indicators of learning difficulties are not found in students who experience verbal learning difficulties. These indicators are students often not doing the assignment, students are difficult to work in a team, students often look moody, and students easily get irritated and offended.

Verbal ability occupies a large portion of the communication, ideas or thoughts are more easily conveyed verbally rather than non-verbally because listeners or recipients of information more easily understand the messages delivered verbally [15]. Verbal learning difficulties are certainly influent students' learning activities. The evidence in some subjects is students who experience verbal learning difficulties obtain lower than average learning outcomes. In addition, the observation also seen that students who experience verbal learning difficulties have difficulty in communication with their friends.

Based on the characteristics or indicators that have been described, it can be said that students who have learning difficulties often show different behaviors than students in general. This behavior is not only in the cognitive aspects but also in the effective and psychomotor aspects. Some unreasonable attitudes and behaviors in students who experience learning difficulties indicate that they need motivation, attention, and guidance, both from teachers and parents.

Despite experiencing difficulties in certain learning material or subjects, if students continue to be guided and motivated, there will certainly be positive changes or developments in the student's learning activities. Guidance from the teachers can be in the form of a re-explanation of the subject matter and guidance in completing the practice/task. The guidance from parents can be in the form of learning assistance at home or when students are doing homework.

Learning difficulties are not only experienced by students who have low intelligence but also influenced by a less supportive environment. When students are studying at school, the learning environment in the classroom is very influential on students, especially those who have learning difficulties. When students are at home, of course the family environment is very influential on students' learning activities, including the parents' roles in helping to overcome students learning difficulties.

3.2. The Parents' Role in Overcoming Students' Learning Difficulties

The parents' roles are to provide children's learning assistance both at home and school. Mentoring at home can be started by knowing the children's learning style and barriers, and then accompany children according to their needs and learning styles. While at the school, it can be done by playing an active role in the school's activities so that children feel that there is parental involvement in the children's learning process. The form of parental attention is providing learning facilities, supervising learning activities, monitoring learning time, knowing learning difficulties, and helping to overcome learning difficulties. Merrell, Felver-Gant, & Tom stated that parents with children that have learning difficulties need to give great attention to children [16]. This attention is one of the factors that contribute to the children's learning process.

There are a number of efforts that parents of elementary school students can do in relation to learning difficulties. These efforts are contacting doctors for initial diagnosis (medical therapy) and manage their childrens behavior , finding relevant institutions or professions, cooperating with special education programs, forming unified teams in families, and communicating with other families. Parental involvement in learning at home are habituating to saying goodbye before going out, picking up or welcoming when children home from school, being a good listener, accompanying children while watching television, and accompanying learning activities. Parental involvement in learning at school is taking children on the first day of school, meeting with the teachers at the beginning and the middle of the semester, being involved in the parents association, and attending the report card distribution. Based on the results of interviews with students, parents, and teachers, there are several roles that parents have already done, and there are also some roles that have not been done by parents.

3.2.1. Contacting the Doctor for an Initial Diagnosis

Most parents have not made an effort to consult a doctor about an initial diagnosis because they think that the learning difficulties experienced by their children are not so alarming. In addition, parents also do not understand whether their children need a psychological test or not. One of the parents admitted that there had been an effort from the family to consult a psychologist regarding his child's learning difficulties,

but the effort had not been followed up until now. Contacting a doctor for an initial diagnosis should be done by parents who have children with learning difficulties. By contacting a doctor, parents will get references about institutions or professions that are relevant to children's learning difficulties.

Contacting a doctor for an initial diagnosis also a form of parental responsibility for children's growth and development. The parents' obligation is to take full responsibility for the children, which is maintaining, raising, caring, supporting, and educating their children with full responsibility and affection. When associated with learning difficulties and parental responsibility for children, contacting the doctor for initial diagnosis is very important for parents to overcome learning difficulties.

3.2.2. Finding Relevant Institutions or Professions

Finding relevant institutions or professions is done by looking at the right tutoring institutions or tutors for children. Students who have learning difficulties have attended tutoring, both outside of school and tutoring held by the school. Looking for tutoring institutions or tutors is one of the parents' roles that can help children in learning. Because of busyness, of course parents cannot accompany their children at all times. Parents also cannot help with all the tasks that must be done by children.

Related to the importance of the parents' roles in supporting children's learning, the parents' role in supporting students' learning achievement are as caregiver and educator, mentor, motivator, and facilitator. Finding tutoring institutions or tutors is included in the parents' roles as facilitator, i.e. providing various learning facilities that support children's learning activities. Learning facilities can also take the form of tuition fees, textbooks, and other facilities.

3.2.3. Working with the Special Education Program

Parents have not cooperated with the special education program other than school. Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School is one of the inclusive elementary schools in Bantul, but mostly the reasons parents choose the school are not related to their children's learning difficulties. The reasons are closer to home and good religious education. Special education programs can be developed by parents, working with elementary school teachers or special mentoring teachers. Through good cooperation, parents should be able to form or develop special education programs, so that they know the right steps to overcome children's learning difficulties.

3.2.4. Forming a Unified Team in the Family

The interviews result showed that parents have not formed a unified team in the family to overcome children's learning difficulties. The reason is because of busy with work and the differences between husband and wife about how to educate their children. Parents' busy time caused their children to meet parents in a very limited time. In addition, children will only depend on the school and tutoring institution about their learning achievements. Families have a big role in personality formation and alleviating children problems. Therefore, parents and other family members can form a unified team in the family that focuses on addressing children's problems, especially in learning.

3.2.5. Communicating with Other Families

Efforts to communicate with other families who have children with the same learning difficulties can be said to have not been done by parents. The reason is that parents feel ashamed of their children's learning difficulties and because of their busy work. Communicating with other families needs to be done so parents can share information. In addition, parents can also achieved good cooperation between families or parents who have children with the same learning difficulties.

3.2.6. Habituate to Saying Good-Bye Before Go Out

Getting used to saying goodbye before go out can cultivate mutual respect and strengthen the emotional connection between family members. Based on the results of interviews, parents have cultivated the habit of saying goodbye before go out and other good habits. The obstacle that parents sometimes have to face is that the children have not fully carried out the habit. Because of that, it is important for the parents to be good examples for their children.

3.2.7. Pick up or Welcoming when Children go Home from School

Parents can find out the children's learning experience by picking up or welcoming when they go home from school. When picking up or welcoming, parents can give a pleasant greeting to the children. This is important because it is a form of parental attention to children and knowing the children's experience. Based on the results of the interviews, picking up or welcoming when going home from school has been done by parents maximally. Most parents understand the benefits or importance of picking up and welcoming

when children come home from school. These benefits include knowing children's stories about learning activities, for security, and fostering closeness with children.

3.2.8. Become a Good Listener

Caring and loving parents can be formed in being a good listener for children. By being a good listener for children, it can improve a good relationship between family members by hearing children's stories or experiences, and become a place for the children's laments. The interviews result showed that parents have tried to be good listeners for children and understand the benefits of that role. An example is the habit of children who tell their parents before going to bed.

In addition to being able to know the children's laments, there can be a closeness between parents and children if parents can be good listeners for children. In addition to nurturing, maintaining, and educating, the responsibility of parents is to protect their children. Being a good listener for children will make the children feel protected by parents. Obstacles is when children do not want to tell anything, thus the parents must be able to create a sense of security and comfort for children. Parents must increase children's self-confidence to tell about their difficulties, so parents can help overcome it.

3.2.9. Accompanying Children when Watching Television

Based on the results of the interviews, parents have not been maximal in carrying out the role of accompanying children while watching television. Busy with work is the reason that the parents do not accompany children when watching television, so there is an omission. This role should be done by parents to help children choose the right programs or events. Likewise, with the duration of watching television, parents need to limit the duration so that children can do learning activities. When accompanying children watching television, parents can do several things such as explaining the shows that are being watched by the children and directing the children to positive things. Parents can limit the duration of watching television by inviting outdoor play, reading books, exercising, and other positive activities so that children's activities are not just watching television.

3.2.10. Accompanying Learning Activities

Accompanying home learning activities is very important to be done by parents because of the many benefits. These benefits are strengthening the parents and children bond, increasing children's vocabulary, improving reading skills. Based on the results of interviews with respondents, accompanying home learning activities is carried out by helping children when doing schoolwork and guiding in learning. Parents need to accompany children's learning activities at home in order to monitor children's learning progress. Parents can also find out children's learning difficulties and help overcome them. In general, students feel more comfortable in learning when accompanied by parents. Students also become more focused on the material being studied. The explanation strengthens the notion that accompanying home learning activities is important for parents to overcome children's learning difficulties.

3.2.11. Delivering Children on the First Day of School

Parents need to take the children on the first day of school as a support for children and get to know the school environment. Things that parents can do when delivering children on the first day of school are parents can exchange telephone numbers with teachers, principals, and fellow parents, and also can get to know the school environment. Parents can also determine the meetings scheduled with the classroom teacher and form parents association, as well as convey the children's history and their expectations toward the school.

Based on the results of the interviews, all parents take the children on the first day of school. In the first day of school, parents are interviewed related to children's readiness for school. In addition to interviews with parents, the school also held a pretest to find out children's readiness.

Parents need to know the children's readiness for school and inform the school about their children's abilities. In addition to communication with the teacher or headmaster, parents can also communicate with fellow parents on the first day of school. The communication also influences other parents' roles, such as the schedule of regular meetings or the formation of parents association, so it is important to do so.

3.2.12. Meeting with Teachers at the Beginning and Middle of the Semester

Parents need to communicate with the teachers to find out the students learning development. Communication between parents and teachers can be done in the meeting at the beginning and the middle of the semester. Meeting at the beginning of the semester can be done to inform the children's history or condition, and to know the school program. Meetings in the middle and the end of the semester can be done

by parents to find out the children's learning development, including learning difficulties experienced by children.

Based on the results of the interviews, most parents have held meetings with teachers at the beginning and the middle of the semester. Meeting at the beginning of the semester is conducted when the first association is held, which is two weeks after the students enter the school. The meeting between parents and the teachers shows parents' involvement in learning at school, and parents are responsible for their children's education.

Benefits gained by parents when conducting meetings with teachers are knowing school programs and activities, and also children development in school. In addition, parents can consult directly with the teachers in supporting the children's growth and development at home, and also can give advice on the progress of the school.

3.2.13. Involved in the Parents Association

Based on the results of the interviews, all parents are involved in parents association. Parents participate in parents association activities every two months. Parents understand that many benefits are obtained from the association. The intended benefits are knowing the of children's learning development, knowing children's learning difficulties, and being able to share information with teachers and other parents.

In addition to these benefits, there are a number of other benefits from the involvement of parents in parents association activities. Parents association is a place of communication between parents and teachers. The benefits are being able to establish closer communication with fellow parents, help schools in advancing children's education, obtain important information about children, and can convey children's problems to the teachers or the school.

3.2.14. Present at the Report Card Distribution

After learning proceeds for one semester, students will receive learning results in the form of report cards. The report cards distribution is attended by parents. Present in the report cards distribution is one indicator of the parents' roles in learning. Parents can find out the children's learning outcomes and can get information directly from the teachers about learning outcomes and children's development in school.

Based on the results of the interviews, parents are always present when the report cards are distributed. Parents also convey permission to the teachers when unable to attend report card distribution. Benefits gained by parents in attending report cards distribution are establishing good relationships with the school, obtaining information about children's development, and as a form of support for children. In addition, parents can consult to the teachers directly on how to optimize children's development at home. Parents can also consult about the right solution to overcome children's learning difficulties.

4. CONCLUSION

Learning difficulties of 5th-grade students of Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School are lower than average learning outcomes, the achievement is not corresponded with the efforts that have been done, slow in doing learning activities, the existence of attitudes and behavior that are not natural, and the existence of unreasonable emotional symptoms. The parents' roles in overcoming learning difficulties of 5th grade students of Muhammadiyah Karangturi Elementary School included: finding tutoring institutions for children, accompanying children when coming and going home from school, being good listeners, accompanying learning activities at home, taking children on the first day of school, meeting with teachers through parents association, and present at the distribution of learning outcomes report cards.

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