Foreign Language Development for a Child with Autism:
A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

This preliminary research is objected to look at 'the possibility and opportunity' of foreign language development for an autistic child. The foreign language development itself is based on behaviour modification approach—antecedent, behavior and consequence. The teaching materials cover English alphabetical letters, numbers, and parts of body. This research is done qualitatively while the data are collected through observation and video-recording. The results serve as the basis for the identification of goals, objectives, and strategies for facilitating development of receptive language and expressive skills, particularly pragmatic skills.
Key Words*: autistic child, behavior modification, teaching English*

Introduction

The objective of this research is to look at 'possibility and opportunity' of foreign language development (English) for an Indonesian-autistic child through behaviour modification. Autistic children communicate with their own way—non-verbaly. It makes people around confused because they cannot understand what those children want and mean. As the result, people mostly and autistic children cannot communicate each other. Actually everybody can communicate with autistic children. According to Veskarisyanti (2008:37), we can develop communication ability of autistic children because in fact they are still potential to communicate, for example with body motion or eye contact. Referring to Vekarisyanti's statement, there is an opportunity to communicate with children with autism. More than that, there must be possibility and opportunity of language development (English) for children with autism.

There are researches which discuss autistic child. Novaria (2007) discusses media used for teaching autistic children in Malang, Indonesia while Carlson, et.al (2009) investigates teaching pre-school children with autism and developmental delays to write in Pacific Northwest, USA. Meanwhile in Southampton, United Kingdom, Remington, et.al. (2007) examine whether early intensive behavioural intervention (EIBI) for children with autism is beneficial in routine use compare with standard pre-school provision. Further, Koegel, et.al (1995) looks at strategies for in initiating positive interactions and improving learning opportunities for children with autism. However, specific researches concern on English language teaching for an autistic child cannot be treasured so far, predominantly in Indonesian setting. Therefore, this research is important to be conducted.

Autism and Its Characterization: An Overview

Autism is firstly introduced by Leo Kanner in 1943. At that time, Kanner in Imandala (2008:5) describes this disorder as disability to interact with another and disorder of languages mastery. The term of autism itself is derived from "auto", which means "alone". Those with autism always feel that they have their own world and tend to be excluded from their environment and enjoy with themselves (Veskarisyanti, 2008:17). Prasetyono (2008: 25) classifies autism as one of neuron abnormal disorders which causes abnormal behaviour (excessive) and disability in doing social interaction and communication because they have different growth of neuron.

Although every person with autism is unique, some characteristics are considered to be particularly important in diagnosis of Autism. These fall into four characteristics—communication, social interaction, unusual behaviour, and learning characteristics (Indiana Resource Centre for Autism, 1997). This is also supported by Veskarisyanti (2008: 18) who states that a child is included as autism if he has obstacle in development of social-emotional interaction, sharing communication, and limited enthusiasm accompanied by repetitive movements and the symptoms have seen before age of 3. Other characteristics of behaviour and learning of students with autism can be categorized as unusual patters of attention, unusual responses to sensory stimuli, and anxiety. Furthermore, people with autism often have difficulty in comprehending verbal information, following long verbal instruction, and remembering a sequence of instructions. The comprehension of language may be context-specific. However,

it varies among individuals (The Special Program Branch of the British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2000). In relation to the research, it is important to identify the possibility and opportunity of teaching language, especially English for autism children in Indonesia because experts believe that it is possible to be done.

Behaviour Modification

Behaviour modification renowned Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) created by O. Ivar Lovaas. Behaviour modification has been successfully used to treat obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), attention deficit or hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), phobias, enuresis (bed-wetting), generalized anxiety disorder, and separation anxiety disorder (Martin, 1988:9).

Theoretically, the basic principles of this therapy are "A", "B", "C"; that is "A" (antecedent) followed by "B" (behaviour) and then "C" (consequence). Antecedent is the beginning or introduction to get attention from the autistic child. Behaviour is the instruction that is given to the autistic child. When the child responds, he will get consequence. Consequence can be in forms of reward or praise (Suriviana, 2008). In the teaching process, the teacher also applies body language and facial expression while implementing antecedent, behavior, and consequence.

This approach is done in order to increase comprehension of children toward regulation and replace undesirable behaviour with activities and behaviours that are more desirable. For example, the act of joggling shaking down body and head must be stopped while learning (Suriviana, 2008). So, behaviour modification is a treatment or approach that replaces undesirable behaviours with more desirable behaviour through positive or negative reinforcement.

Miles (2009) explains that behaviour modification is divided into two reinforcements—positive and negative. Positive reinforcement involves rewarding, praising, and helping to cultivate self image. For example, when their conduct in home is good response based on instruction, they will get reward because of their achievement. Negative reinforcement involves ensuring a child is unpleasantly informed that his behaviour is inappropriate. The purpose of behaviour modification is used to decrease undesirable behaviour with more desirable behaviour by giving reinforcement positive if the children have good respond based on instruction or command and there is no punishment if the children have not responded.

In addition to rewarding desirable behaviour, behaviour modification can also discourage unwanted behaviour, through punishment. Punishment is the application of unpleasant stimulus in reaction to a particular behaviour. For children, this could be the removal of television privileges when they disobey their parents or teacher. The removal of reinforcement altogether is called extinction. Extinction eliminates the incentive for unwanted behaviour by withholding the expected response. A widespread parenting technique based on extinction is the time-out, in which a child is separated from the group when he or she misbehaves. This technique removes the expected reward of parental attention (Miles, 2009). Grandin (1995) says that, whatever the theory or approach, the important thing needs to be considered while teaching children with autism is that the instruction should emphasize paying attention, imitating, comprehending, and using language in play and social interaction.

Method

To elaborate the idea, the researchers employ descriptive qualitative method while the data are collected through observation and video-taped. The data collection was done from June to September 2009. Further, the subject of this research is "I". He is eight years old. He has exhibited symptom of autism before three years. His mother explains that "I" has no eye contact, babbling, excessive movements of hands and feet, focuses only on certain objects, and produces strange sounds. His mother told that her son was developmentally delayed when he was three years old (Interview, on August 2nd 2009). He was a like other 'normal' children before he was diagnosed in the age of four. He has strange movement of motor skills repeatedly such as joggling- shaking-down-body and jumping. In sensory disorder, he likes kissing or licking object. In games pattern, he does not want to play with other children and, in addition, in emotion side, he laughs and giggles inappropriately, and, sometimes cries extremely without any reasons. However, he was unable to follow commands such as wearing shoes, getting a glass to drink, going to toilet and he could not maintain eyes contact. He was also unable to communicate his own needs, express himself when he was in pain, and make a request.

Discussion

This part will discuss the findings. The discussion consists of developing foundation of English: alphabetical letters, numbers, and parts of body. The development process itself is based on behaviour modification approach (Lovaas in Martin, 1988).

Alphabetical Letters

In this part, it will be explained the findings of developing foundation of English alphabetical letters, predominantly A, B, C, D, and E. It is found that "I" is able to communicate with, further, respond all instructions from the teacher. The development process refers to the basic principle of behaviour modification—antecedent, behaviour and consequence. For some trials have been done, please refer to table 1 below.

Table.1 Alphabetical Letters

No	Letters	Antecedent	Respond	Consequence
1.	/ei/	His name	/eh/	He gets reward like candy and praise
2.	/bi:/	His name	/bi:/	He gets reward like chocolate
3.	/si:/	His name	/s/, /si:/	He gets reward like candy and praise
4.	/di:/	His name	/di:/	He gets reward like chocolate and praise
5.	/i:/	His name	/i:/	He gets reward like candy and chocolate

From table 1 it can be seen that the responds of 'I' toward antecedent are various. It can be positive or negative. Moreover, it shows consequences that 'I' got from the teacher if he gives respond for instruction. The consequence can be positive or negative. Miles (2009) explains that behaviour modification is divided into two reinforcements, positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement. Positive reinforcement involves rewarding, praising, and helping to cultivate self image. Negative reinforcement involves ensuring a child is unpleasantly informed that his behaviour is inappropriate.

Numbers

In this part, it will be explained the findings of developing foundation of English numbers, particularly one, two three. It is found that "I" is able to communicate with, further, respond all 'instruction' from the teacher. The development process refers to the basic principle of behaviour modification—antecedent, behaviour and consequence. For some trials which have been done, please refer to table 2 below.

Table.2 Numbers

No	Numbers	Antecedent	Respond	Consequence
1.	/wΛn/	His name	He shows his finger in form "1"	He gets praise
2.	/tu:/	His name and song	He shows his finger in form "2" and say /u:/	He gets reward like candy and praise
3.	/ɵri:/	His name	He shows his finger in form "3"	He gets reward likes candy and praise

From table 2 it can be seen that the responds of 'I' toward antecedent are various. It can be positive or negative. Moreover, it shows consequences that 'I' got from the teacher if he responds the instruction.

Parts of Body

In this part, it will be explained the findings of developing foundation of English—parts of body. It is found that "I" is able to communicate with, further, respond all 'instruction' from the teacher. The development process refers to the basic principle of behaviour modification—antecedent, behaviour and consequence. For some trials which have been done, please refer to table 3 below.

Table.3 Parts of Body

No	Parts of body	Antecedent	Respond	Consequence
1.	/hed/	His name	He touches his head	He gets praise and reward likes candy
2.	/ai/	Song and his name	He shows his eyes	He gets reward like candy and praise
3.	/iə(r)/	His name	He touches his ear and says /r/	He gets reward like candy and praise

From table 3 it can be seen that the responds of 'I' toward antecedent are various. It can be positive or negative. Moreover, it also shows consequences that 'I' got from the teacher if he responds the instruction.

Conclusion

Having discussed the findings, the researchers conclude that "I" can follow and respond his teacher even though some of words are difficult to produce by him. It means that there is possibility of developing foundation of foreign language, in this term English, for a child with autism (in Indonesia). This is done through behaviour modification, particularly antecedent, behaviour and consequence basic principle of behaviour modification. The results serve as the basis for the identification of goals, objectives, and strategies for facilitating development of receptive language and expressive skills, particularly pragmatic skills. Further research is encouraged to be done.

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