



Fostering Environmental Hygiene Habits in Children with Special Needs

Ika Ismatul Hawa^{1*}, Muslam²

^{1,2} Department of Islamic Early Childhood Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia

 *Corresponding e-mail: 2103106027@student.walisongo.ac.id

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Abstract

Environmental hygiene is an important issue that impacts health and quality of life. As a consequence, several measures are required to keep the environment clean, including fostering environmental hygiene habits at an early age. This study aims to describe the habituation of environmental hygiene in children with special needs. The type of research used is qualitative, which is analyzed descriptively, using direct observation and semi-structured interviews with open questions involving participants, namely educators and students five to six years old. The results of this study indicate that the habituation of environmental hygiene in children with special needs at Talented Kindergarten Semarang City runs well through various methods such as hygiene songs, making costumes made from used goods, and applying the concept of *Zero Waste Life Style*. Personal cleanliness and toilet training are examples of habituation, which is the process of doing something repeatedly until it becomes second nature. The existence of adequate facilities can support children in maintaining cleanliness. The involvement of teachers, parents, and professionals in children's therapy influences their growth and development, in order for these activities to foster self-reliance, accountability, and environmental consciousness.

Keywords: *children with special needs; clean and healthy lifestyle; early childhood; habituation*



A. INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation issues such as climate change, air and water pollution, ocean acidification, soil degradation, and declining biodiversity that accelerate the deterioration of environmental conditions globally are considered a threat by many countries today. Environmental damage occurs due to human behaviour that is less or irresponsible towards the environment. For example, in the local scope, environmental pollution due to the disposal of industrial and household waste or garbage (Nugroho et al., 2020). This environmental damage can disrupt the ecological balance which has an impact on human survival. In addition, environmental damage can also trigger natural disasters that cause huge losses. So that environmental care behaviour needs to be instilled in children consistently through daily habituation (Mihratun et al., 2022). The earlier individuals are taught to preserve the environment, the faster their level of awareness in protecting the environment will be (Nurhidayah et al., 2023).

Caring for the environment is one of the actions that can prevent environmental damage (Sari et al., 2022). The low level of human awareness of the importance of maintaining environmental cleanliness is related to the poor condition of natural resources and the environment. Many children, teenagers and adults are still accustomed to littering. Thus, changing behaviour is a top priority in overcoming the environmental crisis. The process of instilling and awareness of the importance of maintaining environmental cleanliness cannot be separated from the application through education, both early childhood education and higher education (Efendi, 2020). Schools are expected to be able to raise students' awareness of environmental cleanliness. Steps to instill this behaviour start from simple activities, such as keeping clothes neat, not littering and other activities with a focus on self-awareness of cleanliness both for yourself and the surrounding environment.

Education is an important foundation in building quality human resources and driving the nation's progress. Investment in education is a strategic step that not only creates competent and competitive individuals, but also improves the welfare of society. Therefore, the education system needs to be adjusted to provide an equal learning experience for every child, including children with special needs (Afifa & Gamaputra, 2024). The concept of educational equality is to ensure that every child in Indonesia has the same right to attend school. The government seeks to eliminate the gap between normal learners and those with special needs. They have the right to an education that suits their abilities and needs. The government affirms that everyone, whether they have disabilities or not, has the right to education up to university level (Fitria et al., 2024).

Law No. 20/2003 Article 5 paragraph (1) on the National Education System states that every citizen has the same rights in obtaining quality education. Furthermore, article (2) states that citizens with physical, social-emotional, mental and intellectual disabilities have the right to special education. Thus, this legal basis emphasizes the importance for every child to have the right to an education that suits their needs (Sembung et al., 2023). As stated in the child protection law number 23 of 2002, every child has the right to live, grow, develop, and get protection from violence and discrimination. Every child also receives health services and social security in accordance with the needs of the child (Ramlah, 2021). In the Minister

of National Education Regulation No.70 of 2009 Article (1) explains that inclusive education is an education system that accommodates children with various kinds of disorders to attend education together with other normal children. Inclusive education aims to provide equal opportunities and rights regardless of the child's background (Azizah et al., 2020).

Inclusion programs provide a system of educational services for normal learners and children with disabilities. Inclusive schools also remove the limitations of the different backgrounds of learners. The inclusive education system is also adapted to the needs of normal students and children with disabilities through adaptations to the learning curriculum, assessment, and infrastructure (Samsuri, 2023). The implementation of inclusive education requires teachers who have knowledge about children with disabilities so that children can be identified what disorders they have and need, so that teachers can provide services that suit their needs. Services that can be provided include medical treatment, therapy and educational services that aim to explore the potential of children with disabilities (Hidayah et al., 2021).

Teaching and learning activities are carried out independently or with the help of parents and teachers, through various learning media carried out in various environments, such as the school environment, home environment and community environment. Here the environment becomes an informal educational institution and the first place where children learn (Widyani et al., 2020). Positive support to develop their potential in cognitive, language, social-emotional, and physical-motor aspects is needed so that stimulation is needed to understand information in the surrounding environment. Therefore, it is important to instill an attitude of environmental care from an early age, especially for children with disabilities (Ramadhani & Masykuroh, 2022). Children with disabilities are children who have advantages and disadvantages that are different from children in general and require special services in order to carry out daily activities (Nisa et al., 2018). The definition of children with disabilities refers to children who have physical, psychological or abnormalities. As such, they require specialized services in order to grow and develop optimally (Rezieka et al., 2021)

The quality of human resources is one of the success factors in the development of a nation. Children's health can form a generation that has a strong physique, tough mentality, good health and superior achievement in facing the challenges of the times against disease (Darmawati, 2021). The high risk of children with disabilities needs to be taught clean and healthy living behaviour to avoid disease. This disease is generally caused by bacterial and viral infections from the surrounding environment (Kusumawardani et al., 2022). Maintaining environmental hygiene from an early age requires a habituation method. The habituation method makes children able to apply and maintain environmental cleanliness. Habituation that is carried out repeatedly by providing stimulation to children can form sedentary behaviour so that it becomes an automatic habit when they grow up (Wijayanti, 2022). Likewise with children with disabilities who need habituation that is carried out repeatedly in order to form good habitual behaviour.

Based on previous research related to the habituation of environmental cleanliness in children with disabilities, several researchers, such as Khairunnisa et al. (2018), suggest the importance of providing knowledge about the environment so that children with disabilities can understand the importance of protecting the environment for humans so that they can

produce citizens who have responsible behavior for their environment and foster a sense of environmental awareness. Habituation activities to instill the concept of environmental care are always reprimanding and directing students if garbage is scattered and carrying out mutual cooperation activities (*bebayaan etam*) in cleaning the environment. Then, research by Yulia et al. (2018) states that implementing a clean and healthy living behavior program instilled in children can provide a positive habit cultured in the community environment. Implementation is carried out through three main strategies; empowerment, atmosphere building, and advocacy.

Talented Kindergarten is a kid-friendly early childhood education facility in Semarang City that has implemented inclusive education. Based on an interview with the principal, it was found that Talenta Kindergarten accepts students with special needs and obtained a decree as an inclusive school since 2010. Students with special needs who study at the institution include students with hearing impairments, disabilities, tunagrahita, down syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, ADHD, and learning difficulties starting from playgroup to kindergarten. Regarding the habituation of environmental cleanliness, the principal stated that the school tries to instill the character of environmental cleanliness as well as possible, considering that education aims to create intellectually intelligent students and a good character in the environment. It is manifested by habituating cleanliness songs, making costumes made from used goods, and the Zero Waste lifestyle concept. Therefore; the author is curious about how the teacher adjusts to keeping the environment clean for kids with disabilities. Talenta Kindergarten offers a diverse student body with a range of background needs, making it an intriguing place for researchers to evaluate the implementation of daily habituation techniques. The purpose of this study is to describe the implementation of environmental hygiene habituation for children with disabilities.

B. METHOD

This study intends to characterize the environmental hygiene habits of children with disabilities at Semarang City's Talenta Kindergarten. Research that employs a natural environment to explain phenomena is known as qualitative research (Ratnawatiningsih & Hastuti, 2022). It employs a natural setting to describe phenomena that indeed occur objectively and to provide a detailed and in-depth description of societal problems based on the activities conducted (Fadli, 2021).

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on educators and children as participants. Educators were selected based on two main criteria: they possess a diploma in early childhood education and have at least five years of teaching experience. The participants comprised 15 children aged 5–6 years with mild disabilities. Data was collected through children's observations during lessons and semi-structured interviews with educators. The interviews were guided by ten open-ended questions designed to explore practices and perceptions of environmental hygiene habituation among children with special needs. The interview findings were analyzed and supported by reference articles on this topic. The interview explored areas such as whether children are taught to maintain cleanliness in their home and school environments, the types of hygiene activities taught, any challenges children face in performing hygiene tasks, and the methods parents or caregivers use to

motivate children. It also examined how hygiene habits affect children's independence, whether they follow hygiene instructions, and any observable changes in their behavior after developing hygiene habits.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Result

Based on the observations, interviews, and documentation results, the implementation of environmental hygiene habituation for children with disabilities at Talenta Kindergarten has gone well. Kids are used to engaging in activities that maintain a clean environment. The habituation of maintaining environmental cleanliness at school in daily activities starts from preliminary activities, core activities, rest activities, and final activities. In early activities, children are accustomed to arranging shoes on the shelf according to the names that have been provided. Core activities: children begin to learn and play with the game tools in the classroom; children obey orders to arrange tables and chairs and prepare a place to pray together. For resting activities, before eating and after eating, children wash their hands under the teacher's supervision. In the final activity, children are accustomed to tidying up their play equipment back to its original place.

The habit of keeping the environment clean is carried out in various ways through hygiene songs, making costumes made from used goods, and zero waste style. In daily practice, maintaining cleanliness includes toilet training activities, maintaining personal hygiene for health, and changing bad habits that interfere with health. To get children used to keeping the environment clean, teachers provide adequate facilities to support children to maintain cleanliness. Environmental hygiene facilities at school provide organic and non-organic waste bins, game racks, shoe racks, clean water, hand washing stations, soap, towels, and hand sanitizers. Complete hygiene facilities and routine habituation can support children with disabilities in improving their attitude of responsibility in maintaining cleanliness and health.

Education can help develop all children's potential and the role of parents in educating children. Children with disabilities have the same rights as other children. For children with disabilities, toilet training is one of the biggest challenges in daily life to maintain personal hygiene. Toilet training habituation activities have also been running well and children are used to doing toilet training activities well without needing help. Classes A and B are used to not using diapers, where the use of diapers aims to anticipate toilet training failure in children. Children with disabilities in carrying out daily activities need services in their lives, such as autistic children who are unable to take care of themselves, eat, and dress. Children with disabilities are less able to perform personal hygiene activities such as eating, drinking, dressing, mobilization, and socialization. These children are also highly reliant on other people. Diapers are still used by school-age children with disabilities, such as cerebral palsy, who struggle to initiate toilet training. Interventions made by school educators include providing therapy facilities that are mandatory for all children. In addition, educators have also been trained in dealing with

various problems with children with disabilities; for example, when learning takes place, children have tantrums, and so on.

Children, in general, have good hand washing skills from an early age, so that at a later age, they can master personal hygiene skills. In contrast, children with special needs are less capable of personal hygiene, especially hand washing. Seeing the ability of children with special needs who are less able to capture information and are slower than other children, the efforts made by teachers at school to maintain personal hygiene are through song learning. This is due to the characteristics of children interested in music and songs, allowing them to capture the information the teacher conveys easily. The song chosen to teach hand washing is the song *Ayo Cuci Tangan*. The song's lyrics explain briefly the steps to wash hands properly and the materials needed when washing hands. Thus, the song helps remind children with disabilities to maintain personal hygiene, namely washing their hands even though they are still under the supervision of the teacher.

In Talenta Kindergarten, one of the activities is the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, which uses goods to make costumes displayed during the art performance at the class B farewell event. Through this activity, they can form a concern for the environment from an early age so that children become creative and innovative in working to produce something worthwhile. In addition to creativity, this activity also strengthens Pancasila values, such as cooperation and love for the environment, to build a sense of responsibility in maintaining environmental cleanliness, which becomes part and parcel of children's habits.

Children's everyday lives and parental involvement are integrated with environmental hygiene education which is implemented both at home and at school. The idea of a zero-waste lifestyle is implemented through a variety of parent-involved activities, including parenting classes, where food is served in a more ecologically friendly manner. The food served is processed through boiling and steaming methods, which generally require less energy and fuel than other methods, such as frying. Food is served using open-formed utensils, such as plates, which reduce the use of disposable materials that become litter after use. The habituation of environmental cleanliness in children with disabilities and the concept of a zero-waste lifestyle also impact understanding and behavior. Namely, children understand how to sort organic and inorganic waste. In addition, each student is required to bring nutritious lunches and mineral water, so that there is a reduction in waste generated by students at school.

Talenta Kindergarten teachers are well-qualified in knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to the material and deeply understand each child's character. The educators in this school have identified children with disabilities when they first enter the school. This is so that they can provide services according to the children's learning experience. The role of educators in getting children used to maintaining cleanliness is to always participate in activities to maintain cleanliness, such as educators guiding children when washing their hands, reminding children to tidy up playing equipment, arranging tables and chairs, supervising throwing garbage in its place, teaching how to clean saliva, snot and tears using a tissue. By doing this, the teachers indirectly set a good example for children and provide affection to children with disabilities.

The success of the habit of maintaining cleanliness is inseparable from the therapy for children with disabilities. This therapy helps children's growth and development in their daily behavior in the academic, social, and emotional fields. As one of the educators said, therapy for children with disabilities has a big impact on the growth and development of children and reduces unnatural behavior in children. Therefore, the involvement of parents, educators, and professionals plays a vital role in supporting and optimizing the potential of children with disabilities.

2. Discussion

Talenta Kindergarten is an inclusion-based early childhood formal education institution that has implemented environmental hygiene through hygiene songs, making costumes from used goods, and a waste lifestyle. Songs about hygiene remind children to wash their hands before and after eating. In addition, the activities of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, namely making costumes made from used goods, can teach children to process used goods into more valuable items and can provide opportunities to be creative with used goods. In addition, the concept of a zero-waste lifestyle is used, which minimizes the use of disposable waste.

Environmental care is an attitude of responsibility and action to maintain cleanliness and preserve the surrounding environment (Fauziah et al., 2020). In Talenta Kindergarten, children are accustomed to maintaining cleanliness and health. The habituation of environmental hygiene at school in daily practice is toilet training activities, maintaining personal hygiene for health, and changing bad habits that interfere with health. For example, children get used to throwing garbage in its place, arranging things when playing, and tidying up when they finish playing. The behavior children with disabilities are accustomed to in maintaining cleanliness consciously or unconsciously with the instructions of educators. One of the educators explained that they are automatically accustomed to doing hygiene behaviour according to what is taught by educators since entering school with repeated habituation, and consistency and patience are required in guiding. Therefore, early childhood growth and development cannot be separated from the influence of the environment. Children's ability to learn and explore is influenced by external stimuli that become habits (Nisa, 2024).

In addition, Mahyuni et al. (2024) demonstrated how the principal's use of the habituation, knowledge, and example-giving strategies influenced children's behavior in adopting a clean and hygienic lifestyle. It provides an environment that encourages kids to lead hygienic and nutritious lives both at school and in their daily lives. Then, The key to successful learning for children with disabilities lies in habituation (Sopandi & Nesi, 2021)

Creativity owned by educators in teaching and learning activities can optimize effective learning outcomes so that teachers are needed to utilize creativity in teaching with school facilities so that educational goals are maximally achieved (Mareza, 2016). The concept of independent learning in early childhood education is known as the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) activity program. Wigayati and Wiyani (2020)

explained that the use of garbage as a learning medium in the P5 activity program can form a pleasant playing atmosphere in the process of developing children's logical thinking skills and creating an enjoyable learning and playing situation so that it can foster children's confidence in basic ability development behavior. In the activity of making costumes using used goods, children with disabilities were enthusiastic about this activity to be creative. However, when children have tantrums during this activity, it can become a problem; for example, children may not be confident, cry, and so on.

Keeping the surrounding environment clean, comfortable, and free from rubbish is everyone's obligation. Overcoming the waste problem requires systematic and consistent waste management. Talenta Kindergarten applies the Zero Waste lifestyle concept in various school activities. Zero Waste Lifestyle effectively minimizes waste in landfills by processing waste to reuse it (Musa, 2022). The Zero Waste lifestyle concept aims to reduce waste so that no more waste is generated by utilizing waste as a helpful resource (Marwati et al., 2023). Then, it is essential to apply the concept of a waste lifestyle from an early age, both in the school environment and the home environment in everyday life (Putra et al., 2022). This concept can increase awareness and knowledge through environmental empowerment and encourage people to manage waste responsibly. In addition, it positively impacts children and schools. They can sort waste and reduce the waste produced.

The success of the habituation of environmental cleanliness includes therapy for children with special needs. Therapy for children with disabilities aims to minimize behavioral problems and improve learning abilities to optimize their growth and development in academic, social, and emotional fields (Ita et al., 2022). The involvement of professionals in assisting children with disabilities is significant in protecting and supporting children's growth and development. So, the knowledge of educators, parents, and the community is essential in optimizing the potential of each child with disabilities (Sunarya et al., 2018). The provision of facilities that facilitate the habituation of environmental cleanliness comes next. Thus, the learning process is supported by the school's environment and cleanliness. Furthermore, Efendi (2023) also show that school facilities, such as tissues, sinks, toilets, and school cleaning tools, support maintaining cleanliness. In addition, professional educators should have good qualifications in knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to the material and a deep understanding of each child's character. In addition, parents and teachers, as the closest people, can teach a clean and healthy lifestyle through daily habituation. They play an essential role in providing role models in the learning process. This is understandable because early childhood learners learn through observation, so they can easily imitate and understand behavior from what they see.

Challenges in the habituation of environmental hygiene in children with disabilities include washing hands, in which teachers use the method of singing together, and instructions in the habituation of washing hands before and after eating or playing. The cognitive limitations of children with disabilities in hand washing activities require appropriate educational methods so that children can understand what is conveyed by educators through audio-visual aids such as videos and posters (Delrefi et al., 2024). To

the characteristics of children who are interested in music and songs, the habituation of hand washing is carried out with songs so that children can easily capture the information conveyed by the educator. Using children's songs as learning media can help educators create a pleasant learning atmosphere, making it easier for children with disabilities to remember the material (Muhtar et al., 2022).

Toilet training in children with disabilities, such as parental knowledge, is very influential, especially in implementing suitable toilet training habituation activities. For example, using diapers for children with cerebral palsy who do not understand how to care for themselves properly. This is due to impaired movement and posture, which results in a decrease in the ability of body functions, so children have difficulty in daily activities (Fatmawati, 2017). Then, Sopandi and Nesi (2021) explains that impaired motor function caused by cerebral palsy is a condition that affects the brain, impacting physical, social, and mental abilities, independence, and adaptation in everyday life. Cerebral palsy at school still wears diapers; they don't understand how to take care of themselves properly. The use of diapers is done to overcome the failure of toilet training faced by cerebral palsy.

This study aligns with Mulyani (2019) who revealed that inclusive education effectively implements environmental care characteristics. This is because students will practice respecting each other and not discriminate against other students with special needs. In addition, the aim is to foster a sense of care and love for the environment. The policies implemented are (1) habituation activities, (2) exemplary, (3) conditioning the school environment, (4) spontaneous actions, (5) integration in learning, (6) extracurricular activities, (7) cooperation with various parties, (8) academic development, and (9) development of learning behavior. Based on this study, it is essential to instill the character of environmental care in regular and special needs children. Good habits will become good characters in the future.

Changes in clean living habits can reduce waste generation and increase environmental awareness in children with special needs. The school environment's cleanliness significantly influences the health and quality of students' learning. A clean environment and comfortable atmosphere can help improve learners' concentration and enthusiasm for learning (Azizah et al., 2019). The importance of maintaining cleanliness can shape children into independent individuals with good character until adulthood. This habituation has good potential in the long run. Children's independence can be formed by supporting them in activities according to their wishes. So that children's dependence will be reduced and they can explore their abilities (Ismail et al., 2024).

D. CONCLUSION

Fostering environmental hygiene from a young age through education and habituation particularly for children with disabilities is important. The ability of children with disabilities to maintain environmental hygiene at Talenta Kindergarten becomes a daily habit through toilet training activities, maintaining personal hygiene for health, and changing bad habits that interfere with health. The implementation of hygiene habituation has shown

positive results in helping children with disabilities grow to be more independent and have an attitude of responsibility for environmental cleanliness so that it supports the health and welfare of children with disabilities.

However, this study faced a limitation during the interview process, as participants' answers did not always match the questions posed. To solve this problem, the researcher rephrased and clarified the queries to guarantee precise and pertinent responses. Expanding the sample size and investigating a broader context for applying environmental hygiene habituation in children with impairments are recommended for future research. Further research may also be conducted to understand better how this habituation affects the kids' capacity to keep their surroundings clean.

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