February 2021

Using e-Social Story to Improve the Social Behavior of Children with Autism during the COVID-19 Pandemic at Rumah Autis Depok, Indonesia

Fitria Ayuningtyas
Universitas Padjadjaran, fitria.irwanto@upnvj.ac.id

Anter Venus
Universitas Padjadjaran, antar.venus@unpad.ac.id

Asep Suryana
Universitas Padjadjaran, a.suryana@unpad.ac.id

Yustikasari Yustikasari
Universitas Padjadjaran, yustikasari39@gmail.com

Using e-Social Story to Improve the Social Behavior of Children with Autism during the COVID-19 Pandemic at Rumah Autis Depok, Indonesia

Fitria Ayuningtyas*[1], Anter Venus[2], Asep Suryana[3], Yustikasari[4]

[1]Doctoral Candidate, Faculty of Communication, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung and Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jakarta
[2]Associate Professor, Faculty of Communication, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung.
[3]Associate Professor, Faculty of Communication, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung.
[4]Associate Professor, Faculty of Communication, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung.

Correspondence:

*fitria18006@mail.unpad.ac.id cc fitria.irwanto@upnvj.ac.id.

ABSTRACT

Children with autism have difficulties in social skills and communication skills. But fortunately, currently, there are many ways developed by experts to help children with autism so that they are expected to grow and develop better, among them are social stories. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all public places closed by governments are no exception to schools. The COVID-19 pandemic is a heavy blow for children with autism, including family. They are very vulnerable to learning and emotional disorders because therapy services have stopped and distance learning is difficult for them. The purpose of this research is to find out how the use of e-Social Story to improve the social behavior of children with autism during the COVID-19 Pandemic at Rumah Autis Depok, Indonesia. The method of this research is qualitative descriptive research. The result of this research indicated that one of the learning styles of children with autism is a visual learner, in which children understand something they see. Using an e-social story is believed to improve the social behavior and developing independence of children with autism.

Keywords: e-Social Story, COVID-19, Children with Autism, Social Behavior.

Introduction

Communication is one of the important things in our life but children with autism, have very severe disorders in the aspect of communication. Autism was first described by Leo Kanner in 1943 as a developmental disease, present from birth in which reciprocal social behavior, language, and communication are impaired and patients display restricted interest and repetitive behavior (Zimmerman, 2008).

Autism is a developmental disorder that affects several important aspects of how children see the world and learn from their experiences. Social dysfunction and unusual response are two essential characteristics of this syndrome (Yuwono, 2012). Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life and affects a person's ability to communicate and interact with others. Autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a 'spectrum disorder' that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees (Autism-Society, 2019).

Scholars who are interested in methods to cope with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can adopt recent technology-rich implementations to ameliorate the instructional atmosphere. In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, ASD is defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder marked by deficits in the areas of social communication and other cognitive and motor behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2012) (Sani-Bozkurt, Vuran, & Akbulut, 2017).

Children with autism have difficulties in social skills and communication skills. But fortunately, currently, there are many ways developed by experts to help children with autism so that they are expected to grow and develop better, among them are social stories. A social story is a form of communication using visual aids. This social story was developed in 1991 by Dr. Carol Gray, a teacher for children with special needs specialist for children with autism. She is also a Doctor in education and a researcher who studies the social skills and behavior of children with autism (Yulianty, 2020).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all public places closed by governments are no exception to schools. All schools finally decide to use distance learning; therefore, they can keep learning even at home. Study at home requires strict supervision from parents. Learning from home for normal children is quite difficult, especially for children with autism.

The COVID-19 outbreak has launched into a health care crisis in the world. This COVID-19 outbreak is impacting families, schools, and communities in unprecedented ways. During this unfortunate time, under completely new and certainly not ideal conditions, we have to address the many needs of the students, including nutrition, physical and mental health, internet access, and online learning options accessibility (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020).

Indonesia reported the first possible community transmission of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) disease in the country on March 2, 2020, after a citizen with no link to certain confirmed cases or travel history to affected countries tested positive for the virus (Ruvic, 2020). Public services, one of which is the school, closed on March 13, 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a heavy blow for children with special needs, including family. Children with special needs, especially children with autism, are very vulnerable to learning and emotional disorders because therapy services have stopped and distance learning is difficult for them.

Based on the explanation above, the purpose of this research is to find out how the use of e-Social Story to Improve the Social Behavior of Children with Autism during the COVID-19 Pandemic at Rumah Autis Depok, Indonesia.

Literature Review

Autism

Autism is a complex developmental disability that is typically manifested during the first three years of life and is believed to be the result of a neurological disorder that affects the

normal functioning of the brain, impacting development in the areas of social interaction and communication skills (Autism Society of America, 2008a) (See, 2011). Parents are usually the first to notice unusual behaviors in their child. In some cases, the baby seems different from birth, unresponsive to people, or focusing intently on one item for a long time. The first signs of autism can also appear in children who seem to have been developing normally. When an engaging, babbling toddler suddenly becomes silent, withdrawn, self-abusive, or indifferent to social overtures, something must be wrong (See, 2006) (See, 2011).

Autism knows no racial, ethnic, social boundaries, family income, lifestyle, or educational levels and can affect any family, and any child. Although the overall incidence of autism is consistent around the globe, it is four times more prevalent in boys than in girls (Lord & Bishop, 2010; Autism Society of America, 2008b) (See, 2011).

Social Story

Social stories are brief, individualized short stories that describe a social situation and provide specific behavioral response cues (e.g., appropriate social responses within a defined context) through visual supports and text (Gray, 1998). A social story provides instruction regarding who, what, when, where, and why of a social situation (Atwood, 1998; Gray, 1998; Gray & Garrand, 1993; Lorimer, Simpson, Myles, & Ganz, 2002). Thus, a social story helps ensure a child's accurate understanding of social information for a given setting (Gray, 1998) and provides "how-to" instruction for initiating, responding to, and maintaining appropriate social interactions (Sansosti, Powell-Smith, & Kincaid, 2004). To date, research on the relative effectiveness of social story interventions used with children with ASD is scant (Sansosti & Powell-Smith, 2006).

The social story format may be an approach that can be used to establish rules or routines for particular social situations (Scattone et al., 2002). Furthermore, traditional social skill instruction (e.g., modeling and role play) may be perceived as aversive for the individual with AS due to the highly social nature of its presentation. By presenting social skill materials in

writing (as opposed to verbal instruction), teachers may render the learning of new skills less aversive and provide the individual with skills that are commensurate with his or her learning style (Sansosti & Powell-Smith, 2006).

Social stories are suggestions to help children with autism better understand the various conditions or situations that arise when communicating with others so that they can interact effectively and behave as they should (Yulianty, 2020). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the social story becomes the e-social story. Not presented manually but through other media such as WhatsApp, google classroom, zoom, telegram, or other media.

Methods

Qualitative data deals with meanings, whereas quantitative data deals with numbers. This does have implications for analysis, for the way we analyze meanings is through conceptualization, whereas the way we analyze numbers is through statistics and mathematics. In qualitative research, inquirers employ theory as a broad explanation much like in quantitative research, such as in ethnographies. It may also be a theoretical lens or perspective that raises questions related to gender, class, or race, or some combination. The theory also appears as an endpoint of a qualitative study, a generated theory, a pattern, or a generalization that emerges inductively from data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2016).

A simple definition of qualitative is an interpretive study involving many methods of studying research issues. The use of these various methods is often referred to as triangulation. It means that the researcher gained a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon investigated (Mulyana, 2018).

Qualitative and descriptive research methods have been very common procedures for researching many disciplines, including education, psychology, and social sciences. This research using a qualitative descriptive approach. This type of qualitative descriptive research used in this research is by utilizing qualitative data and described descriptively. This type of

qualitative descriptive research is often used to analyze social events, phenomena, or circumstances. In other words, this research uses research techniques that combine descriptive and qualitative research. The findings found by the author will later be presented as they are found in the research. So that there is a complete picture of the social situation or it is intended for exploration and clarification of the phenomena that exist in the social environment (Nassaji, 2015).

Research Object

The subjects in this research were volunteers, namely teachers and parents at Rumah Autis Depok because to be able to learn more about how the effectiveness of using e-social stories to improve the social behavior of children with autism during the COVID-19 Pandemic at Rumah Autis Depok, Indonesia.

The research subjects were used in this research because those who well know about children with autism at Rumah Autis Depok and can provide as much information as possible with the focus of research about the e-social story at Rumah Autis Depok. This subject was chosen by purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a data source sampling technique with certain considerations". The reason for using the Purposive Sampling technique is that not all samples have criteria that fit the phenomenon of this research. Therefore, the researcher chooses the Purposive Sampling technique that sets out certain considerations or criteria that must be met (Sugiyono, 2016). Moleong defined that an informant is a person who is useful to provide information about all matters related to the research problem. So, an informant must have a lot of knowledge and background of this research (Moleong, 2009).

The criteria set by the researcher as informants in this research are:

a. Teachers at Rumah Autis Depok, they called as a volunteer. Volunteers know well about children with autism and their families (parents) and have worked at Rumah Autis Depok for at least two years.

b. Parents of children with autism. The researchers set criteria for children with autism that researchers set the criteria for the family or parents.

The data of selected informants as follows:

Table 1. List of Selected Informant (s)

No	Name of Informants	Position	Year of Entry at Rumah Autis Depok
1.	Mr. Suyono (55 years old)	the Branch Head of Rumah Autis Depok	2015
2.	Ms. Larissa Almira Arras (24 years old)	Teacher	2018
3.	Ms. Ririn Riantika (21 years old)	Teacher	2017
4.	Ms. Kaifa Nurussama (24 years old)	Teacher	2018
5.	Mrs. Antie Nurul Ulfa (Mother of Haikal – 10 years old)	Parent	2018
6.	Mrs. Ermina Yusmaini (Mother of Aan – 14 years old)	Parent	2013

Source: The interview results with each informant on July 7, 2020.

Data Analysis

Data analysis as per Patton is processing to arrange about data sequence, organize to some pattern, category, and the discussion unit basic as stated by Moleong (2004) (Ayuningtyas & Uljanatunnisa, 2019). The data analysis process started with all existing data from various sources, such as in-depth interviews, field observation, and literature study. In the qualitative method, data can be collected from various sources by using various data collection techniques (triangulation data). Miles and Huberman (1984) stated that activity to data analysis there are three steps namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion in Sugiyono (2008) (Ayuningtyas & Uljanatunnisa, 2019).
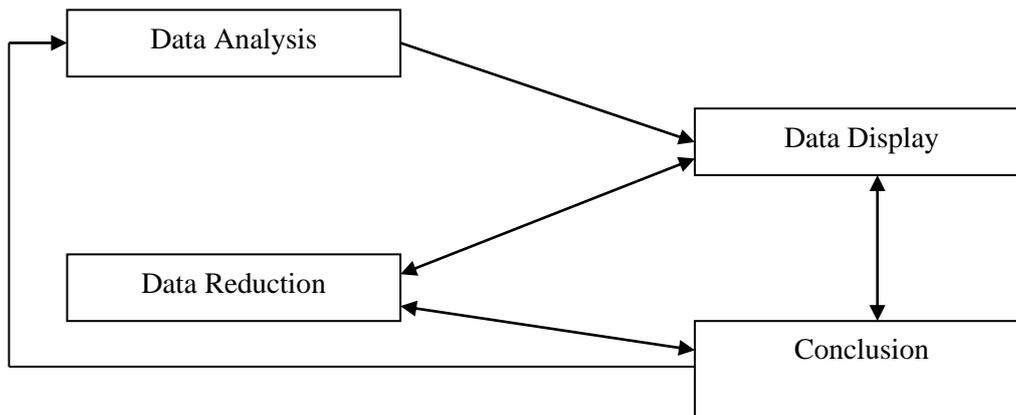
Figure 1. Miles and Huberman's Interactive Model

(Ayuningtyas & Uljanatunnisa, 2019)

Results and Discussion

Results

Rumah Autis Depok is one of the Rumah Autism' branch on behalf of Yayasan Cahaya Keluarga Fitrah, is a social institution that was established to bridge the need for therapy sites and schools for children with autism and the children with special needs from low-income families at affordable costs or even free of charge (Rumah Autis, 2019).

Table 2. The Services Provided by Rumah Autis Depok, Indonesia

No	Name of Services	Range of Age	Number of Children in the Classroom	Therapist/Teacher	Remarks
1.	**Therapy**	Various age	One child	Therapist	Usually called one on one. One therapist handles one child.
2.	**Sekolah Kemandirian Fungsional (SKF)**	1-17 years old	4-7 Children (maximum)	Teacher	Each class has two teachers.
3.	**Transition Class**	Various age	3-6 Children (maximum)	Teacher	Each class has two teachers.

The number of children with autism who attend schools in all branches of Rumah Autis is quite diverse, the diagnosis is not only children with autism, but some have Down syndrome, Speech delay, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), cerebral palsy, so forth. But the most numerous are children diagnosed with autism.

The COVID-19 is a newly discovered type of coronavirus. The new virus and the diseases it causes were not known before the outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The COVID -19 is now a pandemic that has occurred in almost all countries, including Indonesia.

The COVID-19 pandemic has indeed limited human space. The COVID-19 paralyzes all existing activities, one of which is in the education sector. The existence of the COVID-19 outbreak has hampered teaching and learning activities that usually take place face-to-face, which are carried out online or remotely. Almost all levels of education decide to learn distance online. So that automatically requires teachers to be creative and innovative during this COVID-19 pandemic. Even normal children experience significant obstacles in participating in distance learning online, especially for children with autism. The role of parents and family is needed.

So that the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic, Mr. Nadiem Makarim issued Circular Letter Number 4 of 2020 concerning Implementation of Education Policies in an Emergency for the Spread of the COVID-19, which explained that the learning process was carried out at home through online learning to provide meaningful learning experiences to students (Ruvic, 2020).

Through this online learning, it is enough to help the world of education in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. In online learning like this one can take advantage of information technology such as WhatsApp, google classroom, zoom, telegram, or other media.

The Ministry of Education and Culture has regulated policies through the Ministry of Education's Circular Number 4 of 2020 which contains four things. The strategy promoted by the Ministry of Education and Culture is as follows:

1. Online learning, both interactive and non-interactive.

   Teachers must provide education to students about life skills, namely education that is contextual by the conditions of their respective homes, especially the understanding of the COVID-19, regarding its characteristics, how to avoid it, and how to prevent someone from being infected.

2. Home learning must be adapted to the interests and conditions of each student.

   For teachers, the tasks given to students do not have to be assessed as usual in school, but the assessment is more qualitative in nature which motivates the children.

   Through online learning, teachers are required to be creative and innovative in determining learning strategies so that learning objectives can be achieved. Besides, teachers must design online learning by utilizing appropriate media. That way, online learning will provide wider opportunities for students to explore the material being taught.

The existence of distance learning or learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic has proven to make parents and teachers try to adapt to using technology. The COVID-19 pandemic is a heavy blow for children with special needs, including family. Children with special needs, especially children with autism, are very vulnerable to learning and emotional disorders because therapy services have stopped and distance learning is difficult for them. Accompanied by parents, distance learning for children with autism during the COVID-19 pandemic is focused on life skills, namely training and developing their independence, not just academic achievements. This focus on developing independence aims to reduce dependence on children with autism on others.

According to Lakshita (2012: 58-59), one of the learning styles of children with autism is a visual learner, in which children understand something they see (Salam & Widajati, 2017). This learning style is used as a reference in planning and implementing interventions. There are two possible ways of visual learning, one of which is sign language as the most common and

easy one. The second and newest way that the children will use in learning is visual communication (PECS and social story). It is essential to showing the teachers about focusing on nonverbal communication for children with autism. This is grounded by the significance of choosing ways of communication in the learning process so that learning activities will achieve their objectives effectively and efficiently.

But in this research, researchers focused their research using the storytelling method with social stories. According to Hidayat (Rahayu, 2013: 80), storytelling is an activity of telling something that tells about an act, experience, or event that happened or made up. Meanwhile, a social story was chosen because it contained a visual element that was by the learning style of children with autism. The implication of the method of telling stories with social stories is that besides being able to develop speaking skills of children with autism, the method of telling stories with social stories can also develop children's vocabulary and self-confidence. Besides, children's language skills, concentration, and creativity can also be developed through storytelling methods with social stories (Salam & Widajati, 2017). Using the e-social story is believed to improve the social behavior and developing independence of children with autism.

A social story is explaining everything by telling us how to do a skill. For example: how to queue at the supermarket, how to use public toilets and so on. However, social stories are not just telling, we have to provide social stories as a visual representation of what will happen and we make it into stages that the child must do. What should not be forgotten is that after the child can practice it for us, it must be given a reward at the end so that the results are maximum. The smaller the age of the child, the story must be made simple. The more mature the story is made complex. Social stories must also use positive and constructive words and must be accompanied by pictures or visuals so that they are easily understood quickly by children.

The social story stages are as follows:

1. Tell the story. Tell the children about an activity that will be done several times. Don't just do it once, because you have to say something to children with autism especially about new things so that they can understand it.

2. Practice. Then practice what is in the social story, so that children can understand more.

3. Give reinforcement in the form of rewards. If you can do what is in the social story well, then the children must be given reinforcement in the form of rewards. The type of reward can be adjusted according to the condition of each child. For children who are on a diet, for example, they can be given toys or stationery and so on.

   The advantages of the social story have been felt by those who have often involved children with autism such as teachers, therapists, and their families. Through social story in this case e-social story can help children learn to care more about themselves and learn social skills. The e-social story also helping children with autism to understand their behavior. Sometimes, children with autism cannot understand their own emotions. The e-social story can help children with autism to understand their emotions such as anger, sadness, happiness, and so on.

   Helping children with autism more easily cope with the various changes that occur in their daily lives, for example, when a teacher close to them dies. Through social stories, children with autism are taught and accustomed to more easily cope with these changes. The e-social story also is an intervention tool for special behavior so that children can behave appropriately in special situations.

   Another advantage of a social story is helping children with autism increase their strength to those who have behaved well and are willing to follow orders. Stories through social stories reinforce the behavior of children with autism.

Figure 2. Various Images of e-Social Stories

Conclusion

Autism is a complex developmental disability that is typically manifested during the first three years of life and is believed to be the result of a neurological disorder that affects the normal functioning of the brain, impacting development in the areas of social interaction and communication skills. Autism knows no racial, ethnic, social boundaries, family income, lifestyle, or educational levels and can affect any family, and any child. The existence of distance learning or learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic has proven to make parents and teachers try to adapt to using technology. The COVID-19 pandemic is a heavy blow for children with special needs, including family. Children with special needs, especially children with autism, are very vulnerable to learning and emotional disorders because therapy services have stopped and distance learning is difficult for them. This focus on developing independence aims

to reduce dependence on children with autism on others. One of the learning styles of children with autism is a visual learner, in which children understand something they see. Using an e-social story is believed to improve the social behavior and developing independence of children with autism.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest:

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Ethical Approval:

The ethical Approval number for this research was B/2276/XII/2019/KEPK issued by the Ethics Commission of Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jakarta.

Informed Consent:

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the research.

Reference

Autism-Society. (2019). What is Autism? Retrieved January 20, 2020, from https://www.autism-society.org/

Ayuningtyas, F., & Uljanatunnisa. (2019). The power of word of mouth to establish brand positioning (a case study of the house of raminten as a modern style of Angkringan traditional in Yogyakarta, Indonesia). *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *27*(2).

Creswell, J. W. (2016). *Research Design : Pendekatan Metode Kualitatif, Kuantitatif dan Campuran*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.

Moleong, L. (2009). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif (Edisi Revisi)*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.

Mulyana, D. (2018). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif: Paradigma Baru Ilmu Komunikasi dan Ilmu Sosial Lainnya. Bandung: Remaja Rosda Karya*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.

Nassaji, H. (2015). Qualitative and descriptive research: Data type versus data analysis. *Language Teaching Research*, *19*(2), 129–132. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168815572747

National Center for Learning Disabilities. (2020). Serving Students With Disabilities During the COVID-19 Crisis : Spotlight on Policy & Practice Family-School Collaboration, 1–5.

Rumah Autis. (2019). Rumah Autis. Retrieved June 20, 2020, from https://www.rumahautis.org/

Ruvic, D. (2020, March 10). Indonesia confirms first possible COVID-19 community transmission as cases rise to 27. *The Jakarta Post*. Retrieved from https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/03/10/indonesia-confirms-first-possible-covid-19-community-transmission-as-cases-rise-to-27.html

Salam, A., & Widajati, W. (2017). PENERAPAN METODE BERCERITA DENGAN SOCIAL STORY AUTIS DI SEKOLAH DASAR. *Jurnal Pendidikan Khusus*, 1–9.

Sani-Bozkurt, S., Vuran, S., & Akbulut, Y. (2017). Design and Use of Interactive Social Stories for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). *Contemporary Educational Technology*, *8*(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.30935/cedtech/6184

Sansosti, F. J., & Powell-Smith, K. A. (2006). Using social stories to improve the social behavior of children with asperger syndrome. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, *8*(1), 43–57. https://doi.org/10.1177/10983007060080010601

See, C. (2011). The Use of Music and Movement Therapy to Modify Behaviour of Children with Autism. *Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. & Hum.*, *20*(4), 1103–1116.

Sugiyono. (2016). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.

Yulianty. (2020). *Social Stories for Autism*. Bekasi.

Yuwono, J. (2012). *Memahami Anak Autis: Kajian Teoritis dan Empirik*. Bandung: Alfabeta.

Zimmerman, A. (2008). *Autism: Current Theories and Evidence*. USA: Springer.