



## THE POWER OF ROLE-PLAYING IN COUNSELING CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS OF INDONESIA

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### ABSTRACT

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#### Keywords

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Social interaction.

This research was conducted to measure the impact of counseling among children with learning difficulties in terms of motivation and self-confidence. This study is an action research. The research took place in an inclusive school in Indonesia conducted in collaboration between special education teacher, counselor and practitioners. The subjects were 30 learners in mainstream classroom setting where seven children with learning difficulties were included. Data was collected through pretest and posttest and observation. The tests were used to measure their academic achievement, and observation was carried out to see the learning motivation of children with learning difficulties during the respective classroom instruction that employed role play and educational games. The data were analyzed by using SPSS 16 by comparing test scores obtained before and after the cycles of instruction. The results showed that the use of educational games or role play can overcome the problem of motivation and self-confidence of children with learning difficulties. It was also proven by the acquisition of t value which was greater than the value of t-table at the level of significance of 5%, i.e.  $8.789 > 2.045$ . It also proved that the average score before treatment was 123.97 and after treatment was 133.03 with an average increase of 3.622%.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature by investigating the use of role plays to solve problem of lack of motivation and self-confidence in inclusive school. It highlights the effect of combination of counseling and role plays to achieve social interaction, engagement and learning achievement of students with disabilities.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education in Indonesia is the most strategic issue in school education where schools welcome children including those with disabilities. In addition to the existing number of special schools, inclusive schools accept and serve children with all kinds of disabilities where academic as well as psychological constraints often happen. Inclusive schools provide educational services that provide opportunities for children with special needs to study together in regular classes (Sapon-Shevin, 2013). Inclusive schools also provide educational programs by accommodating all students in the same class according to their age and development (Schmidt and Venet, 2012). In practice, therefore, changes and modifications of content, approaches and strategies adapt to children's needs characterize the features of the inclusive services (UNESCO, 2000). In addition to curriculum modification and learning strategies, counseling services for all children including those with learning difficulty are provided.

Academic term of learning difficulty refers to students with difficulty in understanding reading, writing, and mathematics (Lee *et al.*, 2014). Another study Desiningrum (2016) mentions students with learning disabilities can be divided into two groups. First, it is developmental learning disabilities, including motor impairments and perceptions, language and communication, memory, and social behavior (Obaki, 2017). The second is academic-related (reading, writing, and numeracy) based on the capacity they possess, but these two groups cannot be separated explicitly because of the linkage between them. Particularly in elementary schools, students with learning difficulties currently out-number the children with special needs in Indonesia. Based on studies conducted in inclusive schools, there were 2,621 students with learning difficulties. This number is very high compared to other disabilities such as visually impairment, hearing impairment, handicapped and other difficulties (Sunardi *et al.*, 2011).

Children with learning difficulties may experience academic problems, social disturbance, and emotional disturbance (Erten, 2011; Ruth *et al.*, 2016). The academic disability is reflected in child's inability to learn including difficulties in reading, writing, and arithmetic (Onwuka *et al.*, 2015). The learning difficulties experienced by each individual vary. Some have combinations of difficulties in reading and writing as well as other learning difficulties. The learning difficulties may provide labels such as foolish or lazy due to their impairment in school (Ruth *et al.*, 2016). Such condition can result in the low achievement index among their peers in children with learning disabilities. In classroom environment, such children often get bullied by their classmates perceiving them as foolish children (Yell *et al.*, 2016). Rejection in the classroom environment causes emotional characteristics of children with learning disabilities and tend to create riots (Sakız *et al.*, 2014; Asrowi, 2015; Anggraini *et al.*, 2016).

In addition to academic difficulties, problems that often arise in children with learning difficulties include psychological problems that lead to lack of motivation, low learning outcomes, low confidence, emotional problems (Garwood, 2016) and behavioral disorders (Sørliæ and Ogden, 2015). Teachers are at the forefront to overcome problems faced by their students, including those of children with learning difficulties (Desiningrum, 2016).

In both academic and psychological problems, such children are labeled as classroom underachievers. They fail to excel academically which affects disruption of their motivation and self-confidence. Additionally, such children with learning difficulties often get discouraged and therefore they easily give up before achieving the goal (Gunarhadi, 2017). Such students also experience low adversity where they lack perseverance of learning.

Based on the preliminary surveys in an inclusive school, it was felt that some teachers still find it difficult to keep students with learning disability engaged in classroom activities. This problem arises from lack of motivation of students to enroll in the class activity. In an inclusive classroom, there are several students with various learning disabilities. It becomes difficult for teachers to find a comprehensive learning activity to accommodate all their disabilities. Therefore the school should provide a counselor to help students with special learning difficulty but there is a misconception that a counselor cannot serve students with special need in or out of classroom, hence such a need has never been implemented.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Learning Difficulty

Adversity is defined as a conceptual framework to understand and improve all aspects of success. It includes a pro-active response as how to overcome problems (Duthoo, 2013; Capuras *et al.*, 2016; Olofson, 2017). It is a power of cognitive skills that someone may employ to improve the response to turn the problems into achievement. As for students with learning difficulties, adversity is urgently needed in order to improve their response to success. In this way, they can inculcate the internal motivation in terms of fighting spirit to succeed. In cases where children with learning difficulties have high adversity, it helps them not only to solve the academic but also psychological problems such as motivation and self-confidence that can lead to poor achievement and sometime forces them to

drop out. In educational setting, teachers may use adversity to develop students' efforts and fighting spirit to achieve their learning objectives (Dweck, 2000; Fikriyah and Fitria, 2015).

As a professional, a special education teacher is deemed to have pedagogic skills to manage children with learning difficulties. Henceforth, the principles of adversity may well be applied to the learning characteristics of students with learning difficulties. Olofson (2017) suggests four steps to build one's adversity; first is listening to the response of the problems experienced, second, exploring the possible solution, third, analyzing the impacts of the solution, and lastly conducting an action to achieve solution. However, it is noteworthy that single approach of teaching strategy never results in perfect achievement among students, particularly those with learning difficulties. In performing the educational service teachers do not only have quality of special instruction strategy to build motivation and self-confidence. Teachers need to encourage students build their commitment to success. Importantly, care, acceptance, honesty, patience, intellectual competence, ability to approach and flexibility in teaching would give a considerable contribution to students' self-confidence in learning (Futaba, 2016). It should be noted that teaching of children with learning difficulties need to be conducted in collaboration with other professionals. In this matter, a counselor plays an important role of solving psychological problems. A counselor of children with learning difficulties could work with the emphasis on the development of social interaction, personality, and relationships among others (Asrowi, 2012). Counselors provide warmth, receptiveness and care, so that children with learning difficulties feel comfortable and accepted in their social environment (Sakız *et al.*, 2014). In short, counseling plays an important part in building psychological traits such as motivation and self-confidence in learning.

## 2.2. Role Playing in Counseling

Motivation and self-confidence are major problems faced by students with learning difficulties. Students' engagement and social interaction are assumed to be the factors to enhance motivation and self-confidence besides teachers' sense of efficacy (Konstantinidis *et al.*, 2017). Engagement and social interaction therefore become an importance adversity to be solved.

In this study, it is believed that collaboration with counselor will produce better quality of instruction that will result in academic performance among children with learning difficulties (Kahveci, 2016). Counseling services can be carried out in groups by providing social interaction of children with learning difficulties (Erford, 2019). Their guidance can provide these children opportunities to express their feelings and opinions about their problem in learning (Ruth *et al.*, 2016). The counselor can provide a variety of counseling guidance by using educational games to provoke academic skills so as to enhance their learning motivation as well as social acceptance for children with learning difficulties (Kesumawati *et al.*, 2018). In building the psychological power in respect of adversity, the counselor can make use of media too.

Role playing is a kind of game that is believed to enhance such children not only in terms of academic but also psychological endowments. As a game, role-playing can make the joy of learning and relieve the boredom of learning (Charlton *et al.*, 2010; Qiu *et al.*, 2018). Role-playing is the main focus of this research as a means to explore every corner of strategy just to increase the motivation and confidence among children with learning difficulties (Daniel and Cooc, 2018).

Role playing in an appropriate learning material particularly in social studies covering both academic and psychological benefits of meaningful learning (Barnes *et al.*, 2014; Hudson *et al.*, 2015). In term of academic benefits, role playing for students with learning difficulties are accustomed to three ways; experiencing the knowledge through direct learning, concretizing the abstract information of life problems, and performing integrated practical skills. On the other parts, role playing enhances opportunities in building their learning motivation, improving self-confidence, developing emphatic understanding, and giving or accepting appropriate feedback among peers (Toste *et al.*, 2012). The use of role playing in teaching and counseling is expected to give children easiness and joy of

learning to attain academic achievement and significant changes including motivation, confidence, and increasing social interaction accordingly (Purbiyanti and Nuryatin, 2017). As a game, role play involves improvisation that enhances children to develop their creative imagination (Joma *et al.*, 2016).

Some scholars have tried to give an alternative on facing the issue. A study by Kennedy and Farley (2018) suggested the use of group counselling intervention as a strategy to help gifted students to cope with social challenges. They found that a counselor could function as a guide, supporting students to feel social phenomena, like an anthropologist. Another study by Kesumawati *et al.*, (2018) give a game as an alternative to solve a problem of learning disability especially on engaging the student's learning involvement. The study suggested that individual coaching or counseling may give better result. The description of the potential of implementation of role play and individual counseling stated above, inspire the writer to combine the two strategies to fill the limit of study especially in motivation and the issue of self-confidence.

Hence, based on previous studies and arguments surfaced, the present research was planned to assess the degree of adversity of learning through role playing conducted collaboratively to improve the academic achievement, motivation, and self-confidence in children with learning difficulties.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Design

The study used the classroom action research combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative approach was used to measure the primary data from an experiment conducted through time series. The experiment was conducted through pre-test and post-test design. On the other hand, qualitative approach was used to analyze the resulted data from the experiment. This means that qualitative was functioning as a method to support the external validity of the quantitative data obtained from the resulted scores of the experiment.

#### 3.2. Participants

This research identified some research subjects from an intact group of inclusive classroom where several students with disabilities were mainstreamed. The sample consisted of 30 students which included 23 non-disabled, and the rest seven students had various learning disabilities. Among these seven students, four of them had mild math learning problem, and three of them had mild reading problems. The names of the students are disguised as AD, ST, HD, SM, AK, NH and AZ. They were taught collaboratively by a special education teacher who focused on academic practice, and the counselor whose objective was to focus on psychological aspects.

#### 3.3. Research Procedure

The research procedure comprised several steps namely preliminary assessment, intervention through role-play, and final assessment through a test. During the intervention period, the observation tool was used to obtain the qualitative data on motivation and self-confidence. In the role play activity, students who had learning disabilities were accompanied by a counselor. Before they joined the class, counseling was provided to them to find out the specific problems of motivation. During the class, teachers perform the learning process by role playing and give a major or main character to be played by the investigated students. The post test on motivation and self-confidence was also taken after the role play.

#### 3.4. Instruments

Various methods were used to collect data. The pre-posttest method was used to collect teacher's understanding about students' learning achievement while the data on learning motivation was teacher ratings (Daniel and Cooc, 2018). A few teacher survey items were used to rate the frequency of observable students' behaviors that indicated learning motivation. Ratings may be the best way to collect student motivation data for

academic tasks with different disabilities; however, the data varied since it may not have been possible for participants to respond to complex questions. The phenomenon of self-confidence of students with disabilities was understood by the use of interpersonal methods (Melnikova, 2018). Combination of interviews and discussions were observed by elaborating their view on self-confidence of students with disabilities. Finally, all the data was aggregated, combined and converted into a number of scores indicating the level of motivation and self-confidence.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

Data was analyzed by using SPSS 16 using pre-test and post-test, in order to compare the score obtained before and after treatment. Out of 30 subjects, pre-test and post-test score were obtained and analyzed by using t-test paired sample test. The paired sample test was used to compare the results of scores of learners before and after being given guidance and counseling services of educational game of role-playing. Figure 1 presents a summary of statistical description tables of pre-test and post-test scores.

## 4. RESULTS

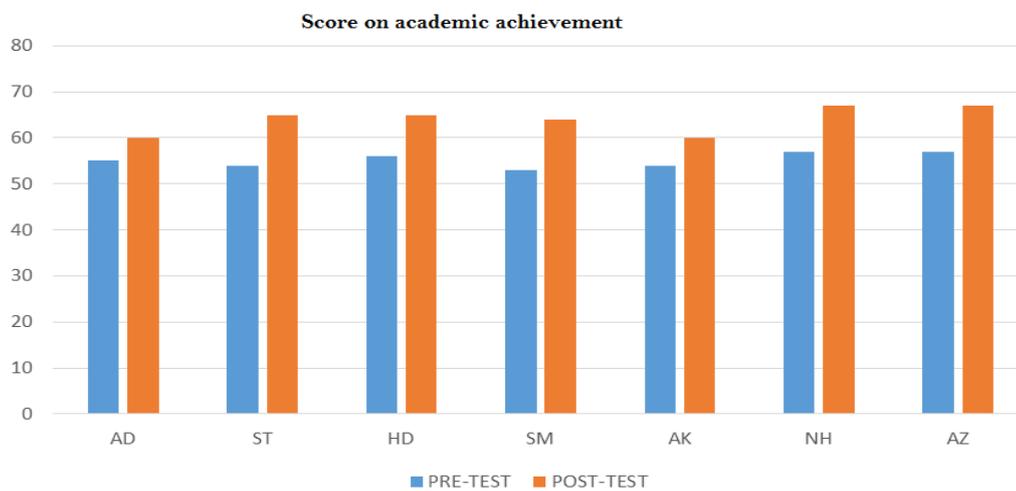


Figure-1. Pre-test and post-test of academic achievement.

The increase in students' academic score is clearly illustrated in Figure 1. The subjects of this research gained an average score of 55.14 in pre-test. After the treatment, the average score of students improved to 64.00 (increase of approx. 16.06%). The highest increase was experienced by two students, ST and SM, with 11 points score improvement. NH and AZ also performed a positive improvement by 10 points. Both of them increased their pretest score from 57 to 67 in post-test, while ST, AK, and AD showed a score improvement of 9, 6 and 5 points sequentially. The score improvement partly supports the findings of the effect of role-playing educative game on students' academic achievement.

Furthermore, by comparing the average score between pre-test and post-test, the researchers took the conclusion that educational games can enhance academic achievement of students with disabilities. Results from the paired samples t-test also showed significance value of 0.00 (in 5% level of significance) with t-obtained as  $9.722 > 2.447$  from t table ( $df=6$ ). It suggests there is a significant difference between students' achievement before and after using role play in learning.

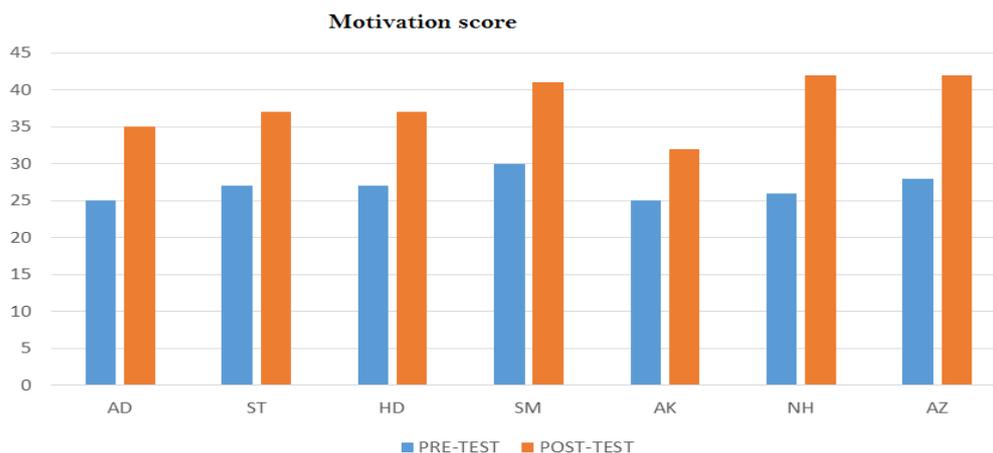


Figure-2. Pre-test and post-test score on motivation.

The improvement was also observed in motivation of students with disabilities. Figure 2 illustrates NH having performed the highest improvement of 16 points followed by AZ with 14 points enhancement. AD, ST and HD also obtained better scores after the treatment. These three students scored an improvement of 10 points in post-test, while SM and AK scored improvement of 6 and 5 points respectively. Overall, the increase of students' score on motivation can be seen clearly. In the aspect of motivation, the subjects gained an average score of 25.85 in pre-test. After the treatment, the average score of students improved to be 38.00 (increased 47%). The average score improvement in motivational aspect was also the highest improvement within the three aspects observed. It showed the positive effect of role play on students' motivation.

The higher improvement on this aspect was also a proof of the effectiveness of role playing on students' motivation. After paired-samples t-test calculation, the data above showed that the t-obtained is 9.933 where means is greater in the t-table 2.447 (df=6). It suggests that there is a significant difference between students' learning motivation before and after using educational games of role playing as learning media. The research also suggests that role playing can effectively motivate students with disability in performing their roles on the stage.



Figure-3. Pre-test and post-test scores on self- confidence.

An improvement was also specifically observed in students' self-confidence. The increase in the improvement score is clearly exhibited in Figure 3. The subjects of this research gained an average score of 29.00 in pre-test. After the treatment, the average score of students in self-confidence improved to be 38.57 (increase of 33%). The highest increase was experienced by AZ with 13 points score improvement. NH and AK also showed a positive

improvement by 12 and 10 points consecutively. Thus, both AD and ST performed an increase of score by 9 points, while HD and SM have the same score improvement of 7 points simultaneously.

Moreover, the calculation of t-test result strongly supports that educational game can enhance students' self-confidence. It can be drawn from the paired samples t-test result that showed significance value of 0.00 (in 5% degree of freedom) with t-obtained 11.015 which is greater than t-table 2.447 (df=6). It proves that there is a significant difference between students' self-confidence before and after role playing.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The t-test result strongly proves that the educational game is effective to boost student's achievement through role-play. This is consistent with the statement made by Erten (2011) who suggested that students with learning disabilities have academic problems such as writing and reading. Fullarton and Duquette (2016) also stated similarly that students with learning disabilities experience internal barriers when learning in the mainstream setting. However, such students need counseling in the same way as other normal children need, in order to develop their potential academically, socially, and emotionally. Despite the diverse experience, and challenges among students with disabilities, the teacher as well as the counsellor need to elicit counseling strategy such as a game of role-play in meeting students' needs (Cross and Cross, 2015). Similarly, even those with gift and talent, they need counseling supports in school settings (Fisher and Kennedy, 2016). More importantly, a counselor should consciously realize that students with disabilities, such as those with learning problems, may have a gift and distinct talent (Kennedy and Farley, 2018). It implies that counselor should make use of strategy that evokes students' fighting spirit to achieve their best in learning.

The research has shown that role playing can effectively build a fighting spirit among students with disabilities in performing their roles on the stage. This inevitably indicates that adversity in respect of perseverance turns to contribute a greater part to personal determination of success (Olofson, 2017). This is in line with the statement by Baroro (2011) who suggested that role-playing functions as a motivating forces for the players to perform at best. Furthermore, the author also stated that in order to perform best on stage, the role player must have strong hidden power of motivation and high perseverance in achieving the desired goal. There is correlation between motivation and achievement (Barkoukis *et al.*, 2014). Motivation serves as hidden expectation to be reached as a reward that deserves the strength of the fighting spirit. This fact was expressed by SM, the role-player of the main character in the game, saying *"I feel so satisfied to play my role in the game whatever it is like, my teacher congratulates me for my successful performance"*. It implies that SM has strong motivation and struggles hard to perform her best. So, she deserves appreciation from the audience.

On students' self-confidence aspect, improvement was also specifically found. An increase in improvement score is clearly seen in Figure 3. These results prove that role playing can effectively enhance self-confidence of students with disabilities. It is worth to noted that students' self-confidence improves due to several reasons. One is the importance of responsibility for the role to play. Role playing gives students opportunities to learn and to be committed to the part of responsibility of the role they are playing. The more they learn to be responsible, the more they are confident in performing their part of the given assignment. Such an assignment appeals students to rehearse the part of the character in role play. Charlton *et al.* (2010) postulate that most students with disabilities find it difficult to grasp concepts and skills when learning. Unless the instructional element has fun, students may become bored and discouraged (Hilliard and Kargbo, 2017). It is believed that game can be very effective means of fun that can be employed in instruction. They need to be motivated to practice over time in order to master what they learn and practice. Hence, a game can be very effective means of fun combined with the instruction. The more motivated a student is, the more successful he becomes (Hamari *et al.*, 2016).

Moreover, when they succeed in their performance, the peers as well as their teacher offer special appreciation. Once they feel content with appreciation, they feel even more convinced of their ability to do their job better. Furthermore, when they succeed in performing their responsibility, they feel even more motivated to do it again and again. To be specific, the feeling of responsibility asserted in role-play turns to have power in building motivation and confidence among children with learning difficulties (Sapon-Shevin, 2013).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Students with learning difficulties experience various problems in school life due to their deficits in terms of behavior, social interaction, and academic performance. This phenomenon over all has negative impact on their motivation, and self-confidence, and academic performance accordingly. These students, therefore, need specific counselling in order that they can improve in their spirit to struggle to actualize their expectation. The counsellor believes role-playing serves as a means to lever the fighting spirit so as to improve their motivation and self-confidence. The facts of the research have shown the proof that role-play improves the adversity skills among students with learning difficulties, especially in learning engagement and better social interaction. Those adversities can be solved by combination of role play technique and counseling service to the power of motivation and self-confidence to support the learning achievement. The higher motivation and self-confidence level can improve the academic performance of the students investigated.

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