



The Application of Skill Play Stimulation to Train Gross Motor Skills in Children with Autism at Sinar Indonesia School, Cibubur

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ABSTRACT

Gross motor development in early childhood is a fundamental aspect in supporting physical, social, and cognitive growth. Children with autism often experience difficulties in gross motor skills such as walking, kicking, and throwing, thus requiring structured learning strategies. This study aims to analyze the application of *skill play* stimulation in training gross motor skills in children with autism at Sinar Indonesia School Cibubur. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. The research population consisted of all children with autism who participated in the inclusion program, while the sample was selected purposively, namely one child with gross motor delays. The research instruments included participatory observation, semi-structured interviews with the principal, classroom teachers, and assistant teachers, as well as photo and video documentation. Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that the application of *skill play* involving kicking a ball, walking on a balance beam, and throwing and catching a ball was able to improve the children's coordination, balance, concentration, and self-confidence. The support of assistant teachers, the use of simple instructions and visual media, and the giving of praise and rewards were important factors in the success of the stimulation. These findings confirm that *skill play* is effective in inclusive learning to improve the gross motor development of children with autism. Further research is recommended to involve more participants and extend the duration of the intervention to strengthen the generalization of the results.

Keywords: Autism, Early Childhood Education, Gross Motor Skills, Inclusive Education, Skill Play

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood (0–6 years) is a critical phase of physical and motor development, in which play is the primary medium for growth and development stimulation. Through play activities, children move their large muscles in activities such as jumping, running, and imitating the movements of animals or airplanes in accordance with the National Early Childhood Education Standards (Permendikbud, 2014). This condition is also important for children with autism, who often experience delays in gross motor skills such as throwing, catching, or jumping, which have an impact on their interaction with the environment and other developmental opportunities (Badi'ah, 2019). Research shows that intervention methods, such as occupational therapy or the use of movement tools, can improve motor skills in children with special needs (Kusumawati & Pamuji, 2024; Prabowo et al., 2021).

Several recent studies highlight the effectiveness of various gross motor stimulations through creative and fun approaches. Kusumawati and Pamuji (2024) found that occupational behavioral therapy was proven to improve motor skills in children with autism through a pre-experimental design (p test ≤ 0.05). Meanwhile, the development of special exercise tools for running, jumping, and throwing was successfully validated by experts at the Jambi Special School (Prabowo et al., 2021), showing that functional and tool-based stimulation provides real improvements in gross motor skills.

Research Problems

Although intervention has been proven effective in some contexts, the application of gross motor stimulation in autistic children through the *skill play* method still faces various limitations in the field. At Sinar Indonesia School in Cibubur, initial observations show that the focus and concentration of autistic children in gross motor activities is still low; teachers are not yet competent in providing stimulation; facilities and infrastructure are inadequate; and parents do not yet understand the importance of stimulation at home. These conditions limit the opportunities for optimal intervention (Researcher observation, 2024).

Another problem is the lack of integrated resources involving teachers, therapists, and parents in a single inclusive learning framework. In accordance with Law No. 8 of 2016 and Law No. 20 of 2023, special education must involve various parties synergistically to support children with special needs, including autism. However, practices in the field do not yet fully reflect these principles of inclusivity (KemenPPA, 2023).

On the other hand, previous studies tend to explore gross motor stimulation through special tools or therapies, but not many have explored the role of *play skills* as a comprehensive approach that combines the aspects of play, teachers, and parents in a single systemic framework. In fact, structured play has been proven effective in improving gross motor skills in early childhood (Ferasinta, Padila, & Anggita, 2022), while creative interventions such as *loose parts* improve fine motor skills, which also affect overall coordination (Muarifin et al., 2023).

Research Objectives, Urgency, and Novelty

This study aims to examine the application of *skill play stimulation* by teachers in training the gross motor skills of autistic children at Sinar Indonesia School in Cibubur. Specific objectives include mapping implementation strategies, the roles of teachers and parents, and the influence of the school environment on the responses of autistic children. This research is important because it provides empirical data for the education of children with special needs in a post-pandemic environment, where limited interaction and facilities pose new challenges.

The novelty of this research lies in its geographical and cultural context—Sinar Indonesia School in Cibubur, which differs from previous studies; the post-pandemic research period (2024/2025), which brings new socio-environmental dynamics; and the focus of the study on individual autistic children in a *skill play* setting, rather than solely on occupational therapy or special instruments.

Research Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to deeply understand the application of *skill play* stimulation in training the gross motor skills of children with autism at Sekolah Sinar Indonesia Cibubur. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to explore the meanings, experiences, and social interactions of participants in a natural context. According to Sugiyono (2022), qualitative research focuses on non-numerical data through observation, interviews, and documentation so that it can provide a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied. This approach is also inductive and flexible, making it suitable for examining the dynamics of inclusive learning involving teachers, assistants, and children

with autism. In addition, data analysis follows Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions that are repeatedly verified to obtain accurate findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sugiyono, 2022).

The instruments used in this study consisted of observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted participatively to directly record the forms of *skill play* stimulation carried out with autistic children. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, classroom teachers, and assistant teachers to explore information related to the role, objectives, and impact of these activities. Documentation in the form of photos and videos was used as supporting data to reinforce the results of observations and interviews. The collected data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis technique, which includes data reduction to filter information according to the research focus, data presentation in the form of systematic descriptive narratives, and drawing conclusions that are continuously verified with field data to remain consistent and valid (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2021).

The population in this study consisted of all children with autism who participated in the inclusion program at Sinar Indonesia School in Cibubur, along with the teachers and assistants involved in the implementation of the stimulation. The research sample was selected purposively, namely one child with autism who was active in *skill play* activities with teachers and assistants. This sample selection was based on the consideration that the subject could provide rich and in-depth information in accordance with the research objectives. Creswell (2021) explains that purposive sampling is often used in qualitative research because researchers need participants who are considered to be most knowledgeable about the phenomenon being studied.

The research procedure was carried out in several stages. First, preliminary research was conducted on April 1, 2025, with initial observations to understand the research context, develop instruments, and coordinate with the school. Second, the implementation stage was carried out from April 14 to May 2025, during which the researcher directly observed *skill play* activities and conducted interviews with informants. Third, the data analysis stage was carried out from May to June 2025, by reducing the data, presenting the results in narrative form, and drawing verified conclusions. The final stage was the preparation of the research report, which was carried out until July 14, 2025.

Data validity is maintained through several techniques. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing data from the principal, classroom teachers, and activity documentation. Validity is also strengthened by member checking, which is verifying the interpretation results with participants to ensure consistency with their experiences. The dependability of the research is maintained by fully documenting the research process so that other researchers can replicate it with consistent results. Confirmability is ensured through an audit trail that shows the relationship between data, analysis, and findings. In addition, transferability is achieved by presenting a detailed description of the context so that the research results can be considered for application in similar situations. According to Sugiyono (2022), the application of triangulation, credibility, and contextual description are the main ways to ensure the validity of qualitative research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of the study indicate that *skill play* stimulation contributes significantly to training the gross motor skills of children with autism at Sinar Indonesia School. Physical motor development, especially basic skills such as walking, running, kicking, and throwing,

are important aspects that affect children's overall growth and development. In children with autism, motor development is often stunted, requiring structured and adaptive learning strategies. Field observations confirm that through *skill play* activities, children gain direct experience to optimize their motor skills in a fun atmosphere.

During the preparation stage, teachers and researchers developed lesson plans, media, and mentoring strategies tailored to the individual needs of each child. This preparation included creating lesson plans, providing play equipment such as balls and balance beams, and arranging a conducive learning environment. Sinar Indonesia School, as an inclusive school, has supporting facilities, including a sensory therapy room, inclusive classrooms, and an outdoor play area. This arrangement helps children feel comfortable so that the stimulation process can run more optimally.

The implementation of *skill play* stimulation activities focused on three main types of activities, namely kicking a ball, walking on a balance beam, and throwing and catching a ball. These activities were chosen because they can train children's coordination, balance, and physical strength. The child with the initials DS, as the subject of the study, was able to follow simple instructions, although initially still required intensive guidance from the accompanying teacher. The use of visual media in the form of instruction cards proved effective in helping DS understand the stages of the activities to be performed.

During the stimulation process, it was found that the child's motivation increased when the teacher gave clear instructions and support in the form of praise and *rewards*. At the beginning of the activity, DS appeared hesitant and had difficulty concentrating, but through gradual repetition of the activities, his motor skills began to develop. For example, in the first week, DS was only able to kick the ball with direct guidance, while in the third week, he began to be able to do it independently. This shows a progressive improvement in the child's gross motor skills.

In addition to improving motor skills, *skill play* activities also had an impact on other aspects such as concentration, self-confidence, and social interaction. Observations show that DS began to be able to interact with teachers and peers, albeit to a limited extent. He was more courageous in trying new activities and showed positive expressions when he successfully completed the challenges given. Interviews with accompanying teachers confirmed that this kind of stimulation is very important to help children with autism develop their potential.

The evaluation stage was carried out systematically through observation notes, assessment sheets, and documentation in the form of photos and videos of activities. The evaluation emphasized the achievement of indicators of gross motor development in accordance with national PAUD standards (Permendikbud No. 137 of 2014). The evaluation results showed that DS had improved in his ability to kick, walk steadily on a balance beam, and throw and catch a ball. In addition, he was also able to follow simple instructions better than at the beginning of the study.

Overall, the findings of this study confirm that the application of *skill play* stimulation in the context of inclusive education is effective for training the gross motor skills of children with autism. The support of assistant teachers, adaptive learning strategies, and a child-friendly learning environment are key factors in the success of this program. With the involvement of teachers, schools, and parents, *skill play* stimulation can be used as a sustainable learning strategy that supports the holistic development of children.

Discussion

Through the research findings above, in this section the researcher will discuss the research findings and examine them using the theory presented in the previous chapter. In practice, it is true that stimulation can train the gross motor skills of children with autism. The

gross motor skills of children with autism differ from those of typical children. There are various factors that influence the gross motor development of autistic children, such as genetic, neurological, sensory, and environmental factors. With the provision of *play skill* stimulation, it is hoped that autistic children can develop their skills in various aspects according to their age. The success of learning cannot be separated from the role of teachers, parents, and the environment. Sinar Indonesia School is an inclusive school that accepts all kinds of children, both those with special needs and regular students (without special needs) in the same learning environment. This school is perfect for parents who want to enroll their children without discrimination and with learning tailored to the needs of the child. The application of *skill play* stimulation to train the gross motor skills of autistic children is carried out through activities such as kicking a ball, walking on a balance beam, and throwing and catching a ball. Sinar Indonesia School conducts stimulation activities on a regular basis with the help of a shadow or assistant teacher. This research was assisted by an assistant teacher for autistic children named Ms. Siti as a collaborative partner in conducting observations during the research. The number of students in the sample focused on one autistic child who was being trained in gross motor skills through stimulation activities. The play environment was arranged according to criteria of supporting and contrasting materials with multiple intelligences in accordance with the child's interests and talents, namely spatial, kinesthetic, musical, naturalistic, scientific, logical-mathematical, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Another thing that is no less important is the provision of a conducive learning environment, the use of varied learning media, and the utilization of learning resources from the surrounding environment. The learning environment was arranged using a variety of play models by providing 3-4 different play activities every day. Stimulation activities began after free activities with a stimulation activity time of about 30 minutes. The results of analyzing the gross motor development of autistic children show that there are activities that stimulate or encourage gross motor development both indoors and outdoors. Open spaces/fields, sensory therapy rooms, or inclusive classrooms are used as spaces to stimulate children with special needs. Schools and teachers provide aids such as balls, balance beams, number carpets, throwing rings, etc. With stimulating activities, it is hoped that their development can grow optimally and they can catch up. During *observation*, all forms of respect from students, both verbal and non-verbal, are recorded. Assistants at Sinar Indonesia School play an active role in the development of autistic children. Stimulation, supervision, guidance, and support are very necessary for autistic children according to the needs of each child.

The use of *skill play* stimulation to train gross motor skills at Sinar Indonesia School is based on the developmental delays experienced by each student and is tailored to their needs. The use of *skill play* stimulation to train the gross motor skills of children with autism at Sinar Indonesia School is carried out through a structured, fun approach that is tailored to the needs and characteristics of each child. It uses an individualized and visual-based approach (pictures or motion cards). Simple and repetitive instructions are given. Praise and positive rewards are given after the child successfully completes a task. Intensive assistance is provided by teachers, shadow teachers, or therapists. The following is a complete explanation of how this is implemented. *Skill play* is a form of structured play that aims to train specific skills, such as motor, social, and cognitive skills. There is a child named DS who has delayed gross motor development. At the age of 8, his developmental achievements and behavior have been studied by teachers and schools, and he is at the level of a 5-6-year-old child. Teachers and schools strive to provide stimulation to catch up on his developmental delays so that he can socialize with his surroundings. Stimulation begins with activities that can train the gross motor skills of children with autism.

Gross motor development involves movements of large muscles and the entire body, such as walking well, kicking a ball, climbing, throwing, and catching a ball. This is assessed by directly observing the activities that are commonly carried out on a daily basis at Sinar Indonesia School, as well as observing whether children are able to follow the activities according to instructions and expectations. The activity was conducted with initial observation on May 19, 2025, when the activity carried out was ball kicking stimulation. The first step was a demonstration by the teacher, who explained slowly, accompanied by gestures and repetition. Then, the children were given a turn to kick the ball. They were directed to the line using an arrow, and the teacher helped with the command "one, two, kick!" The children were directed to kick in the desired direction, after which they were praised. DS showed interest in kicking the ball, but still needed help and guidance from the assistant teacher. The implementation of *play skill* stimulation in the middle phase was carried out with an activity of walking on a balance beam on May 26, 2025. First, the teacher demonstrated how to walk slowly on the balance beam, then the child was directed to the balance beam, given commands and visual support ("let's walk on the beam! With picture cards), the child walked with the help of the teacher. When the child was able to repeat the activity, he was allowed to walk by himself, using rewards (stickers/praise) every time the child tried. The final phase of *skill play* stimulation was carried out through a ball throwing and catching activity for children with autism on June 2, 2025. At the beginning of the activity, the teacher shows how to throw and catch the ball slowly, then the children are invited to play in pairs or with the teacher. The teacher gives the ball to the child and says, "Throw it to the teacher!" After that, the child tries to throw the ball, then the teacher throws it back and the child catches it (using a brightly colored ball to attract the child's attention). At the end of the session, the teacher gives appreciation for each child's effort in throwing and catching the ball. The stimulation efforts, carried out gradually, are expected to enable children to achieve more complete physical-motor development, so that the achievement of physical motor skills in this movement will support their level of genius.

The need to apply *skill play* stimulation (directed play) to train the gross motor skills of children with autism at Sinar Indonesia School is very important because children with autism experience challenges in gross motor skills. Children with autism spectrum disorder often experience developmental barriers in gross motor skills such as kicking, jumping, walking in balance, and body coordination. Without proper intervention, they may have difficulty participating in physical, social, and academic activities at school. *Skill Play* is a structured play approach. *Skill play* involves play activities specifically designed to improve basic motor skills, train body coordination, and increase focus and concentration. *Skill Play* can help with social adaptation and interaction at school. With the right play stimulation, children find it easier to engage in group activities, increase their self-confidence, and encourage natural social interaction in the context of play. These benefits are very much in line with the values of inclusion and holistic development applied by Sekolah Sinar Indonesia. *Skill Play* is in accordance with the principles of the independent curriculum. The independent curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, fun and meaningful activities, and the development of individual potential. *Skill play* is an ideal medium because it can be tailored to the unique needs and abilities of each child with autism. Its implementation at Sekolah Sinar Indonesia provides a supportive environment. Sekolah Sinar Indonesia has teachers trained in special needs education, adaptive learning facilities and methods, and an inclusive environment that accepts each child's uniqueness. With this support, the implementation of *skill play* stimulation can be more optimal and focused.

In dealing with children who are not yet capable of stimulation activities, teachers and assistants have a significant impact on the child's development. Responsibility during stimulation activities is the main task for teachers and assistants. Sinar Indonesia School implements *skill play* stimulation to train the gross motor skills of children with autism based on indicators as a measure of achievement. The tasks carried out by teachers usually consist of examples, commands, and repetition. This stimulation program is created individually by the assistant teacher for each child. The program created by the assistant teacher or individual program will run well and without obstacles if it is consistently implemented. Stimulation activities will be repeated if the child has not achieved the predetermined developmental indicators. A child's ability is seen from the way the teacher gives directions and their patience in repeating them so that the child is willing to keep trying. If the child is capable, other activities will be added but still within the aspect of gross motor skills. Previous activities will be reviewed so that the child does not forget. The evaluation of the child reported to the parents can be seen in the three-month report card through the indicators that have been achieved or not.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the application of *play skill* stimulation is effective in training the gross motor skills of children with autism at Sinar Indonesia School in Cibubur. Structured play activities such as kicking a ball, walking on a balance beam, and throwing and catching a ball can improve children's coordination, balance, concentration, and self-confidence. The results of the study also show positive changes in social interaction and learning motivation, especially when teachers use simple instructions, visual media, and give praise or rewards as reinforcement. The role of assistant teachers, inclusive learning environment support, and parental involvement are key factors in the success of this stimulation program.

However, this study has limitations because it only involved one child with autism as a research subject, so the results cannot be generalized to all children with autism. The relatively short duration of the study also limited the scope for observing the long-term effects of applying *play skills*. Therefore, further research should involve more participants, extend the intervention period, and explore the collaborative involvement of teachers, therapists, and parents in greater depth. In practical terms, the results of this study can be used as a reference for inclusive schools and early childhood teachers in designing targeted play activities for children with special needs so that their gross motor skills can be optimally and continuously improved.

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