

EFFECTIVENESS OF M-CHAT IN SCREENING AUTISM IN CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AT SLB FISABILILLAH MUARO PANEH, SOLOK REGENCY

Lailatul Husna^{1*}, Rahmahtrisilvia¹, M.Sukron¹, Rezki Vidora¹, Wulan Hariani¹, Tria Ardianti¹

¹ Pendidikan Luar Biasa, Universitas Negeri Padang

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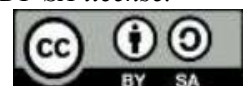
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ABSTRACT

Autism is a complex neurological development disorder that affects communication skills, social interactions, and children's behavior. Early detection is the key to providing appropriate and effective interventions. This study aims to describe the effectiveness of using the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT) instrument as an autism screening tool in children with special needs at the Fisabilillah Special Needs School (SLB). The research method used is descriptive qualitative with a case study approach. The subject of the study was a 9-year-old 11-month-old student who participated in the educational program at the Fisabilillah Special Needs School. Data were collected through structured interviews using the M-CHAT instrument consisting of 23 question items, direct observation, and documentation review. The results of the analysis showed that the subject showed eye contact response patterns, responses to names, and social imitation abilities. These findings identify the need for further evaluation by experts. The M-CHAT instrument has proven effective as an initial screening tool that is practical, easy to apply by educators, and able to systematically identify indicators of autistic behavior in the SLB environment.

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Corresponding Author:

Lailatul Husna | Pendidikan Luar Biasa, Universitas Negeri Padang

Email: lailatulhusna092@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological development disorder characterized by obstacles in communication, social interaction, and the presence of repetitive and limited behavior patterns. According to World Health Organization (WHO) data, the global prevalence of autism is estimated to reach 1 in every 100 children, making this condition one of the most common developmental disorders in the world. In Indonesia, awareness of autism continues to increase along with the development of inclusive education services and special education. Special Schools (SLB) play a strategic role in providing educational services that are appropriate to the needs of children with developmental disorders, including children with

autism. However, one of the biggest challenges faced is the limitation in the process of early identification and screening that is accurate, standardized, and easy to implement.

Early detection of autism is very important because interventions given at an early stage of development have been proven to produce better outcomes for children. One of the instruments that has been internationally recognized for the purposes of early screening of autism in toddlers is the Modified Checklist for Autism (M-CHAT). This instrument was developed by Robins et al (1999) and has been adapted into various languages, including Indonesian, for use in clinical and educational contexts. M-CHAT consists of 23 items answered by parents or caregivers through a structured interview. The items cover various aspects of behavior such as eye contact, response to name calling, imitation ability, and symbolic play behavior. Children are declared to have failed screening if they fail 2 or more critical items, or fail 3 items in total.

This research was conducted at SLB Fisabillah with the aim of describing the effectiveness of the application of the M-CHAT instrument in identifying autism indicators in students with special needs. It is hoped that the results of this research can provide a real contribution to the development of educational assessment practices at SLB.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Case studies were chosen because they allow researchers to explore in depth the application of the M-CHAT instrument on a specific subject in the context of a SLB environment. The research subject is a female student with the initials MA, aged 9 years and 11 months, who is registered as a student at SLB Fisabillah. The subject's demographic data were obtained through an identity form completed by the parent. Data collection was carried out through three techniques, namely: (1) structured interviews using the M-CHAT instrument involving parents as the main sources; (2) direct observation of the subject's behavior in the school environment; and (3) review of documented child development records.

The M-CHAT instrument used consists of 23 question items with a Yes/ No answer format. Each answer is categorized as pass or fail according to the established response key. Critical items include item 2 (interest in other children), item 7 (use of index finger to indicate interest), item 9 (showing objects to parents), item 13 (imitation ability), item 14 (response to name), and item 15 (ability to follow pointing direction). Data analysis was carried out descriptively by identifying the failure pattern of M-CHAT items, comparing them with applicable diagnostic criteria, and interpreting the findings in the context of the subject's daily behavior at school.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Subject Profile and M-CHAT Screening Results

Based on the results of the M-CHAT interview conducted with the subject's parents, it was obtained that the subject showed several behavioral patterns that needed further attention. Of the 23 items evaluated, there were a number of items that showed failed responses, including item 1 (does not like swings), item 8 (cannot play with small toys normally), item 9 (never shows objects to parents), item 13 (does not imitate facial expressions), item 15 (does not follow pointing direction), item 20 (not suspected of having a hearing impairment), and item 21 (poor understanding of other people's speech). From the analysis of critical items, the subject failed more than 2 critical items so that based on the M-CHAT criteria, the subject was

classified in the failed screening category and required further diagnostic evaluation by a professional .

Behavioral Analysis Based on M-CHAT Findings

Classroom observations supported the findings from the M-CHAT screening. Subjects demonstrated minimal eye contact initiation, difficulty following verbal instructions , and a tendency to play alone without involving peers . Teachers reported that subjects often did not respond when their names were called , especially without physical touch . These findings align with research by Robins et al. (2001) which stated that failure on critical M-CHAT items , particularly those related to joint attention and social imitation , had a high predictive value for an ASD diagnosis. Further research by Kleinman et al . (2008) also confirmed that the M-CHAT has a sensitivity of 85-87% in detecting risk for ASD in early childhood .

3. Effectiveness of M-CHAT in SLB environment

The implementation of M-CHAT in SLB Fisabilillah shows several advantages . First , this instrument is easy to understand and implement by teachers through M-CHAT in the SLB Context , namely this instrument was originally designed for children aged 16-30 , so its application to school- age children such as the subjects in this study is adaptive and needs to be combined with other assessment instruments that are more age- appropriate . Therefore , the results of M-CHAT should be seen as an initial step that needs to be followed up with a comprehensive assessment .

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results , it can be concluded that the M-CHAT instrument is effectively used as a screening tool in the Special Needs School environment, especially in identifying indicators of autistic behavior that need intervention attention . The research subjects showed a pattern of failure in a number of critical M - CHAT items , especially in the aspects of eye contact , response , and imitation ability , which indicates the need for further diagnostic evaluation . The implementation of M - CHAT in SLN Fisabilillah proves that this instrument can be part of the routine assessment practice of special needs education , as long as it is used carefully and combined with direct observation and cross- professional collaboration . Special Needs School teachers have a strategic position to become early detection agents by utilizing standardized instruments such as M-CHAT.

The recommendations that can be put forward based on this research are : (1) SLB needs to integrate M=CHAT as part of the new student admission process ; (2) SLB teachers need to receive periodic training in the use of screening instruments ; (3) synergy is needed between schools , parents , and health professionals in following up on screening results .

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