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Adaptation Process on Blind Students and Teachers in Special Education School

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ABSTRACT

In Indonesia there are approximately 3.5 million people with blindness in both eyes. With this number, Indonesia ranks third in the list of countries with the highest blindness rates in the world. Half of the blindness sufferers, suffer from blindness due to cataracts. In adolescents blindness disorders usually occur due to myopia. This paper examines the adaptation process of students and teachers with visual impairments in Special Education School (the National SLB-A). The researcher uses the constructivist paradigm and the process adaptation theory. Data collection is done by observation, in-depth interviews, and literature study. Data analysis was performed with qualitative data analysis. The research findings show that in the process of adapting informants through several stages, such as stress caused by inner conflict due to facing a new situation (being blind), imbalance (disequilibrium) that arises in the form of uncertainty, confusion, and anxiety emotionality. They also face some obstacles in adapting, because the attitude of parents who are too protective (overprotected) and teachers who also always want to help. To overcome this adaptation, teachers, family, and peers play a very large role.

Keywords: blindness, adaptation process, special education school

INTRODUCTION

Globally the number of people of all ages visually impaired is estimated to be 285 million, of whom 39 million are blind. More than a quarter of the World's population --some 2,2 billion people -- suffer from vision impairment out of which, one billion cases could have been prevented or have been left unaddressed, according to the first World Vision Report released by the World Health Organization (WHO) on October 2019.

WHO defined visual impairment (tunanetra in Bahasa) as any loss or abnormality in an anatomical structure or a physiological or psychological function. In line with this definition Soemantri (in Sundari & Aulia, 2019) explained, the visually impaired are individuals with a sense of vision who do not function as receivers of information channels in their daily activities. Factors that caused blindness come from internal and external. Internal factors are factors that are closely related to hereditary problems and the growth of a child in the womb. While external factors are factors caused by external conditions, for example caused by cataracts, glaucoma, or diseases that can cause visual impairment, understanding blindness is not only for those who are blind, but also includes those who are able to see but are very limited and cannot be utilized for the benefit of daily life.

Today, in Indonesia 3.5 million people experience blindness in both eyes. With blindness reaching 1.5% higher than other countries in Southeast Asia, Indonesia ranks third as the country with the highest blindness rate in the world. The most common causes of blindness in Indonesia, including: cataracts (0.78%), glaucoma (0.20%), refractive disorders (0.14%), and retinal disorders (0.13%), and corneal abnormalities (0.10 %).

Half of blindness sufferers in Indonesia experience blindness due to cataracts. Some others are caused by myopia. Myopia or nearsightedness is a condition when light entering the eye is focused in front of the retina, thus making distant objects blurred (James, in Sofiani and Puspita Santik, 2015). (Ilyas, 2012), myopia can be divided into three categories; mild, moderate, and severe. Myopia is progressive in childhood and tends to be stable when they reach the age of 20 years or late teens. WHO research results show that myopia in adolescents is more common in girls than boys in the ratio of 1: 4. Facing this bad condition, WHO initiated the Vision 2020: Right to Sight program on February 18, 1991. The program, which is supported by the government, NGOs and professional associations of eye health agencies, aims to reduce the number of eye diseases that can cause blindness. The Right to Sight has

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a mission to improve the data that cause blindness and solutions to eliminate problems; identify and guarantee resources needed throughout the world to improve prevention and treatment programs; facilitate the planning, development and implementation of the three core 2020 vision strategies by national programs.

In addition to preventing and treating blindness, the government provides Special Education School for children who are blind. One of them is the Extraordinary School for the Blind (SLB A) Jakarta. It was inaugurated by President Soeharto on December 9, 1981. In this school, there are several levels of education, ranging from special kindergarten, special elementary school, special junior high school, and special senior high school. Some blind students have normal intellectual abilities, but some are accompanied by intellectual, motor, and autistic disabilities. Students with visual impairments with this other obstacle are categorized as multi-disabled students with visual impairments.

Some of these students have experienced total blindness since they were kids, but there are also those who were born still able to see but experienced a few obstacles (low vision). Children with low vision usually slowly decrease their vision function until they experience total blindness. Students with this condition face a very difficult situation, because they inevitably have to accept conditions that are different from beforehand.

In the process of adaptation, communication actors have interactional synchrony, it is a kind of coordinated forward and backward pattern of steps that is influenced by three things namely requirements, expectations, and desires (Littlejohn, et al. 2006). This paper examines the adaptation process of students who experience from mild eye disorders into totally blind. This study aims to understand how students adapt to their new conditions through the mechanism of requirements, expectation, and desires; and the obstacles they faced during adaptation process, and the efforts they made in adapting.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. Qualitative research aims to explain the phenomenon profusely through deep data collection (Kriyantono, 2008). The study was conducted in Special Education School of Jakarta (the SLB A). The school was chosen because it has trustee level of governmental school. The informants consisted of three people who were chosen deliberately (purposive sampling) based on the experienced case. In addition, there were three additional informants, consisting of two teachers who had undergone an adaptation process and a class teacher who accompanied the informants.

The research data were obtained from observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation of research subjects in daily activities in the classroom, computer laboratories, and massage classroom. The in-depth interview included the process of adapting to their new conditions. The researchers proposed and developed questions to the informants according to the informants' answers. The data analysis in this research used triangulation to measure and cross check the result of data obtained in interview and observation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Every creature in his life always experience change. At each stage of this change people will experience adaptation. Adaptation is the ability of living things to adapt to their environment (Hendriyani, 2018). Adaptation can be in the form of adjustments to body behavior and function (Leitch, 2017). Children who are born can still see, but gradually their vision decreases until they are totally blind must adapt. As experienced by the following informants.

Informant W (girl, 14 years old) admitted that her vision had declined at the age of six. "The doctor said, my eyes had been disturbed since I was a baby, but my parents did not know. One day when I woke up suddenly my eyes could not see. I experienced this condition for a month. After recovering my right eye is blurred, while my left eye is no longer functioning," (Interview on 17 September 2019).

The doctor advised W to go to Jakarta for treatment. She was treated regularly, but the results did not appear. We went to Singapore for treatment, but the doctor there raised his hand. Upon returning from Singapore, W moved to Jakarta to try herbal therapy. She was boarding at her mother's friend's house.

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Furthermore, W who studied at a private elementary school in the Kemang area of South Jakarta revealed,

"Every day I have to take six herbal capsules. Besides that I was treated to a massage on my hands and feet. The result, not bad. My eyes are rather bright. I had participated in inclusive education. The teachers treat me as the same as other normal students. The difference is that during the exam there were volunteers who read the questions. That's all," said W who did not like being pitied.

W tried to learn as best she could, besides to take guitar and drum music courses. But slowly her eyesight declined. She can no longer read the writing on the board, so it is advisable to move to special education school SLB A. This was where she started to feel a different condition than before. At her first times at school, a teacher asked her to learn to read Braille.

"In my heart I protested. I can still read! Why do I have to read Braille?" She recalled. W's offense also appears when she goes down the stairs then a teacher took her. She was never treated like that before. "In my previous school, teachers thought that I was the same as other students. Why in here (my new school), I must be helped," W continued.

According to Ngatidjo, a senior teacher at special education school SLB A, "Children who have been able to see and then they gradually can no longer see, they need to adjust themselves. They are in poor decision making, have a high level of anxiety and lack of courages. Therefore, they really need the support of the environment, especially from the family. In addition, they also need the help of psychologists to strengthen their mental and motivation.

Van Hasselt (1983) said that research and clinical case reports reveal a relatively consistent pattern of problems in social adaptation in visually handicapped children, adolescents, and adults. Moreover, there are some indications that later impairment in socialization maybe associated with inadequately formed "attachment" between blind and infant and mother.

HR (male, 32 years old), a student council teacher at W school who had blindness since he was a teenager stated, "I had been quitted for school for a long time, almost five years (2003-2008) because I could not accept the fact that I was blind. Moreover, many friends insulted me and teachers did not accept me," HR, who has been accepted as a SLB-A teacher since May 2019, recalled.

At that time HR could no longer see the letters on the board. The glasses could not help. "The doctor said I had glaucoma and needed a surgery at Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital, Jakarta," HR said. He was hoping that he might be recovered from the illness.

He underwent surgery for second time but his world remained dark. Nevertheless, he still wanted to go to school. Unfortunately, his surroundings refused. His friends often joked and bullied him. The teachers also lacked understanding of the new conditions of HR. His daily assessment in school was never marked because his handwriting was very bad. HR was unable to deal with this condition. He stopped going to school. Everyday he was enjoying his time in his bedroom and listening to radio broadcasts. Sometimes, he did jogging or cleaning his clothes. HR seemed to avoid external people. "At that time, finally I started not to care to my friends who used to play me," said HR.

Things began to change when the H family moved to the city of Palembang, capital city of South Sumatera. One day HR's mother met with a Principal of a Vocational School and the Chair of a rehabilitation center for the visually impaired. He encouraged HR to return to school and live in an orphanage. Although this was opposed by his father, but finally HR began to study again at SLB-A Palembang and was placed in a vocational massage.

"At that time I was 21 years old. I have kind and supportive friends there. They encouraged me to move to special education school in Bandung, because many alumni of this school could continue their studies to universities. Lucky me, my parents gave their permission for me to move to Bandung."

While studying at the orphanage, he took special education at high school level. After obtaining his high school diploma he enrolled at UNINUS (Universitas Nisantara) Bandung, which is disabled-friendly. "The lecturers were very supportive to disabled students, even though the facilities and infrastructures were not yet supportive," HR said, who joined Diffable Student Forum during his study. HR graduated and got cum laude in 2015. After that he had applied for master study in Australia but because of some reasons, he postponed the application.

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While W and HR had difficulties in adapting the new condition, another student, I (boy, 14 years old) had different case to the blindness condition, he could only see like shadow since he was a kid. "I used to study in public elementary school. However, my vision declined gradually, then my father moved me to special school, here in SLB A," I told so. He said that he liked to read Al Qur'an (holy book of moslem) and wanted to be a preacher (ustadz, a person who deliver religious teaching). He felt more comfortable in the school because his teachers spoke softly and loved their students very much.

According to Schneider (1984), the adaptation process is a dynamic process and passed through three elements: 1) motivation and self-adjustment process; 2) attitude towards reality and the process of adjustment; and 3) the basic pattern of the adjustment process. Based on these three elements and information from informants, motivation is a key factor in the adaptation process. The motivation possessed by the informants came from both external and internal environment. Motivation is driven by external factors that they got from the environment outside their self, especially those closest to them, particularly from the family (parents and relatives), and teachers. The family and teachers become the main motivators who encourage informants to be able to adjust to the new conditions they experienced. These external factors are then internalized into the informants'self, so that it strengthens their motivation to adjust to new conditions as blind people. Elements of attitude towards reality and the process of adjustment can be seen from the continued living of social relations in the lives of informants, for example such as W who continues to take music courses actively, learn to recite, massage, understand some programs in the computer. Meanwhile, in terms of the basic pattern of adjustment, the informants make adjustments by forming new patterns in their social life, such as adjusting to learning braille, exercising mobility with or without the aid of a tool (stick), and continuing to carry out some activities that they have been carried out since before becoming blind, for example using public transportation, appearing in several events to play music, and establish relationships with fellow blind people.

According to Rowland (Vaoghan, et al, 2018), in general, blind people are in an environment that requires closeness ("beholded-ness"), a perspective that said that they are people who need help in reading, access to transportation, and shopping access for example. Furthermore, it can be said that every human sometimes needs the help from others in dealing with complex problems. However, for persons with visual impairment, the issue of assistance is sensitive because of the variety of assistance they need, but on the other hand they feel they have no other choice but to receive the assistance. In general, blind people are dependent on others and give up on fate. However, dependencies that occur among people with visual impairment are no longer an issue that arises in their social interactions because of a mutual relationship (symbiotic relationship), even with normal people.

CONCLUSIONS

Like individuals in general, blindness sufferers are individuals who need social relations in their lives. The process of individual adaptation from normal conditions to being visually impaired is certainly not an easy thing. Encouragement and motivation internally and externally, the closest people and selfawareness become the power for people with visual impairment to undergo social relations.

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