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CASE STUDY: MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN STUDENT WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY AT SLB NEGERI PEMBINA MATARAM, INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study examines maladaptive behaviors in children with intellectual disabilities at SLB Negeri Pembina Mataram. These children often face challenges in social and academic adjustment, leading to behaviors such as physical aggression, self-injury, social withdrawal, and resistance to instructions. The research employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the underlying causes of these behaviors and the factors influencing them. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, special education staff, and parents, as well as document analysis. The findings indicate that communication barriers, cognitive and emotional limitations, and environmental factors such as inconsistent family discipline significantly contribute to maladaptive behaviors. In addition, classroom management strategies, including structured routines, individualized interventions, and positive reinforcement, were identified as key methods for managing these behaviors. The study concludes that a comprehensive approach involving teacher training, collaboration with parents, and support from mental health professionals is crucial for effectively addressing maladaptive behaviors and promoting positive outcomes for children with intellectual disabilities.

Keywords: Maladaptive behavior, intellectual disabilities, special education, behavioral intervention, classroom management.

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1. Introduction

Intellectual disabilities refer to limitations in cognitive functioning and adaptive behaviors that affect an individual's ability to learn, communicate, and carry out everyday tasks (Hronis et al., 2017). These disabilities can range from mild to severe and typically manifest before the age of 18. Individuals with intellectual disabilities often require tailored educational support to help them develop essential life skills and enhance their social interactions. Education plays a crucial role in fostering independence and

improving the overall quality of life for individuals with intellectual disabilities (Adamczyk et al., 2023; Taconet et al., 2023). However, despite structured educational programs, children with intellectual disabilities frequently encounter difficulties in social adaptation and academic performance, which can significantly impact their development (Silva & Elias, 2023).

Children with intellectual disabilities, who refer to individuals with developmental intellectual disorders, often face various challenges in adapting to their social and academic environments. These intellectual disabilities not only affect cognitive abilities (Nowicki & Brown, 2013) but also their social aspects (Hartika et al., 2023), which are crucial in the learning process at school. Numerous studies have shown that children with intellectual disabilities experience greater difficulties in interacting with peers and educators, which ultimately affects their social and academic development as a whole (Dewi et al., 2024). In the educational context, poor adjustment to the curriculum and social interactions in class becomes one of the main challenges for children with intellectual disabilities (Chung et al., 2019).

At Special Education Schools (SLB), children with intellectual disabilities are provided with education tailored to their specific needs. However, challenges still arise in the learning process, particularly in terms of maladaptive behavior that emerges as a response to difficulties in social and academic adjustment (Hartika et al., 2023). Maladaptive behaviors such as aggression, hyperactivity, and difficulties in adapting to social rules can disrupt their social interactions, which in turn affects their academic development (Schoop-Kasteler et al., 2023). Poor social adjustment, which frequently occurs in children with intellectual disabilities, becomes one of the biggest obstacles in the learning process, considering that effective education highly depends on good interaction with peers and educators (Smith et al., 2020).

Previous studies have shown that social (Leonard et al., 2022), psychological & biological (Hronis et al., 2017) factors play a significant role in the development of maladaptive behaviors in children with intellectual disabilities. Difficulties in emotional regulation, challenges in social interactions, and limitations in cognitive and communication abilities are primary causes of these maladaptive behaviors (Samson et al., 2015). Additionally, environmental factors, such as social support from educators and parents, also play a significant role in influencing the behavior of these children. In this regard, successful management of maladaptive behaviors depends not only on behavioral interventions but also on modifying the social environment to better support the child's development (Friedman et al., 2019).

This study focuses on children with intellectual disabilities at SLB Negeri Pembina Mataram. The school faces challenges in providing optimal education for children with special needs, particularly in managing the maladaptive behaviors that frequently arise among students. Therefore, this study aims to delve deeper into the types of maladaptive behaviors commonly found at this SLB and the underlying causes.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Approach

This study utilized a qualitative case study approach to examine the maladaptive behaviors of children with intellectual disabilities at SLB Negeri Pembina Mataram. A case study design was chosen to enable an in-depth exploration of individual cases within their real-life context, allowing for a comprehensive

understanding of the challenges faced by both students and educators.

2.2 Data Sources

The primary data sources for this study included students exhibiting maladaptive behaviors, teachers, special education staff, and parents. Secondary data were obtained from school documents, behavior records, and relevant literature to support the analysis.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using multiple qualitative methods to ensure a holistic understanding of the research problem. Direct observations were conducted in the classroom and school environment to document students' maladaptive behaviors and their interactions with teachers and peers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including teachers, special education staff, and parents, to gain insights into the types of maladaptive behaviors and the factors influencing them.

2.4 Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process involved several steps: first, data familiarization was achieved by transcribing interviews and reviewing observation notes. Then, coding was performed to identify key themes and patterns related to maladaptive behaviors and their contributing factors. These codes were categorized into broader themes to provide meaningful insights. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to existing theories and literature to draw conclusions about the behaviors and intervention strategies.

2.5 Validity and Reliability of Data

To enhance the validity and reliability of the study, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was used by combining multiple data sources, including observations, interviews, and document analysis, to cross-check findings and ensure consistency. Member checking was conducted by allowing participants to review interview transcripts and preliminary findings to confirm accuracy. Peer debriefing involved engaging with fellow researchers to discuss findings and interpretations, reducing researcher bias. Additionally, thick description was provided to offer detailed accounts of the research context and participants, ensuring a deeper understanding and potential transferability of findings. By employing these methods, this study aimed to provide a robust and credible analysis of maladaptive behaviors in children with intellectual disabilities and the factors influencing them.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Maladaptive Behavior in Children with Intellectual Disabilities

Maladaptive behavior in children with intellectual disabilities manifests in various ways, including physical aggression, self-injury, withdrawal from social interactions, repetitive behaviors, and resistance to instructions. These behaviors often hinder not only the child's personal development but also their ability to engage in the educational process effectively. Understanding the underlying causes and triggers of these behaviors is crucial in creating appropriate intervention strategies that support both the child and their learning environment. One of the primary triggers for these behaviors is the child's inability to express emotions effectively, leading to frustration and disruptive actions. This communication barrier

makes it difficult for children to convey their needs, wants, or discomfort, which in turn results in expressions of distress through physical outbursts or avoidance behaviors. In many cases, the frustration from misunderstood emotions exacerbates existing behavioral issues, making intervention even more challenging. Classroom observations at SLB Negeri Pembina Mataram revealed that these behaviors not only impact the affected students but also create disruptions that influence the learning experience of their peers. The presence of frequent maladaptive behaviors can cause anxiety among other students, reduce overall classroom productivity, and place additional stress on teachers who must constantly manage these challenges. Consequently, finding effective ways to address these behaviors benefits not only the individual student but the entire classroom community.

Teachers and special education staff reported significant variability in the severity of maladaptive behaviors among students. Some children displayed mild forms of resistance to academic tasks, such as refusing to follow instructions or disengaging from activities, while others exhibited more severe behaviors, including intense aggression or self-harm. The degree of behavioral challenges was found to be closely linked to the child's level of cognitive and emotional development, as well as the availability of structured support systems in their learning environment. Some children exhibited mild resistance to tasks, while others displayed extreme aggression or self-harm. One teacher noted, "Some students refuse to participate in class activities, while others become physically aggressive when they do not understand instructions."

Another prevalent maladaptive behavior observed among children with intellectual disabilities was withdrawal from social interactions. This issue was particularly common among students with more severe intellectual disabilities, who often struggled with understanding social cues and forming peer relationships. Many children engaged in self-isolating behaviors, such as avoiding eye contact, sitting alone during group activities, or showing a lack of interest in social engagement. Without appropriate intervention, this tendency toward social withdrawal can hinder the child's ability to develop essential social skills and foster meaningful relationships. Many children displayed repetitive behaviors such as rocking, hand-flapping, or murmuring to themselves. These actions often served as coping mechanisms in response to stress or overstimulation. Without proper intervention, these behaviors could persist and become barriers to learning and social integration.

The school environment played a pivotal role in shaping the occurrence and intensity of maladaptive behaviors. Classrooms that implemented structured routines, clear expectations, and consistent reinforcement strategies saw a noticeable reduction in behavioral issues. In contrast, classrooms where teachers faced difficulties in maintaining order and providing individualized support experienced more frequent disruptions. Providing educators with adequate training in behavioral intervention techniques and fostering an inclusive, supportive classroom environment are essential steps in mitigating maladaptive behaviors and promoting positive student outcomes. Classrooms with structured routines and clear behavioral expectations recorded fewer instances of maladaptive behavior. Conversely, in classrooms where teachers struggled with behavioral management, disruptions were more frequent, affecting the overall learning process.

3.2 Factors Influencing Maladaptive Behavior in Children with Intellectual Disabilities

Several factors contribute to maladaptive behavior in children with intellectual disabilities. Understanding these factors is essential for designing effective interventions and creating supportive learning environments that address the needs of these children. One of the primary factors influencing maladaptive behavior is cognitive and emotional limitations. These limitations affect a child's ability to regulate emotions, process information, and respond appropriately to various situations. Many children with intellectual disabilities struggle with impulse control, leading to frequent emotional outbursts and difficulty adapting to structured learning environments. When these children experience frustration due to communication barriers, they may resort to aggressive or withdrawn behaviors, making it essential to implement targeted emotional regulation strategies. Many students struggle with impulse control, leading to frequent emotional outbursts. A special education expert interviewed stated, "Children with intellectual disabilities often experience frustration due to communication barriers, which can result in aggressive or withdrawn behavior".

Another crucial factor is environmental influences, including family dynamics, school environment, and peer relationships. Children from unstable family backgrounds or those exposed to inconsistent discipline tend to exhibit more maladaptive behaviors. A lack of structured support at home can create confusion for the child, particularly when disciplinary approaches at school differ from those at home. Schools that foster strong teacher-parent collaboration and provide consistent reinforcement strategies tend to see better behavioral outcomes among students. Children from unstable family backgrounds or those with inconsistent discipline are more likely to exhibit maladaptive behaviors. A parent interviewed remarked, "We struggle to maintain consistency at home, and it sometimes conflicts with the school's approach, confusing the child". These inconsistencies can lead to heightened behavioral challenges in school settings.

Teaching strategies and the availability of resources also significantly impact behavioral outcomes in children with intellectual disabilities. Educators who lack training in behavioral interventions often find it challenging to manage disruptive behaviors effectively. Schools with structured teaching methods, visual aids, and individualized learning plans generally observe higher student engagement and fewer behavioral issues. Providing teachers with specialized training in behavior management can improve classroom environments and reduce the frequency of maladaptive behaviors. Teachers reported that a lack of training in behavioral interventions limited their ability to manage disruptive behaviors effectively. Schools with better teacher training programs saw fewer instances of behavioral issues. Observations revealed that classrooms with structured teaching methods, visual aids, and individualized learning plans had better student engagement and fewer behavioral incidents.

Peer interactions also play a vital role in shaping behavior. Children who experience bullying, social exclusion, or lack positive peer relationships are more likely to develop maladaptive responses. Encouraging social inclusion through structured peer mentoring programs and cooperative learning activities can help improve social skills and reduce instances of disruptive behavior. Ensuring that children with intellectual disabilities feel supported and included within their peer groups fosters a more positive and adaptive behavioral pattern. Children who experienced bullying or social exclusion were

more likely to develop maladaptive responses. Encouraging positive peer interactions and implementing peer mentoring programs helped some students improve their social skills and reduce disruptive behaviors.

Finally, community-based support systems are essential in managing maladaptive behaviors. Schools that partner with mental health professionals, social workers, and community support networks can provide a more comprehensive approach to behavioral interventions. Creating an inclusive support system that extends beyond the classroom can help children receive consistent guidance and reinforcement, ultimately improving their long-term behavioral development. Future research should explore how integrating community resources can further enhance intervention strategies for children with intellectual disabilities. Schools that partner with mental health professionals and social workers can provide a more holistic approach to behavioral interventions. Future research should explore how integrating community support networks can further enhance intervention strategies for children with intellectual disabilities.

3.3 Teacher Strategies for Managing Maladaptive Behavior

Teachers play a critical role in managing and reducing maladaptive behavior in children with intellectual disabilities. Their ability to implement structured interventions and adaptive teaching methods significantly influences student behavior and classroom dynamics. Understanding and applying evidence-based strategies can help create a supportive learning environment that minimizes disruptions and promotes positive behavioral outcomes. A fundamental strategy for managing maladaptive behavior is positive reinforcement. This technique involves rewarding desirable behaviors to encourage their recurrence, reinforcing positive actions through verbal praise, tangible rewards, or privilege-based incentives. Teachers reported that acknowledging small achievements significantly improved student motivation and engagement. Structured reinforcement schedules help in gradually shaping student behavior toward more appropriate responses., where desirable behaviors are rewarded to encourage repetition. Teachers reported that praising students for small achievements significantly improved behavior. "Even a simple 'good job' or a small reward can motivate students to behave appropriately," a teacher shared.

Equally important is structured classroom management, which involves establishing clear routines, rules, and expectations to create a stable and predictable environment. Predictability helps reduce anxiety and supports students in adapting to daily activities with minimal disruptions. Teachers found that implementing visual schedules, step-by-step task breakdowns, and structured transitions between activities helped students maintain focus and reduce impulsivity.. Establishing a predictable routine helps students feel secure and reduces anxiety, which in turn minimizes behavioral disruptions. Visual schedules and clear instructions proved particularly helpful in maintaining order. Classrooms that implemented structured routines observed a decline in resistance to instructions and impulsive behaviors.

Behavioral interventions tailored to individual student needs have also proven effective in managing maladaptive behaviors. Individualized behavior modification plans incorporate strategies like redirection, self-regulation techniques, and structured break times. These plans help students develop coping mechanisms and gradually replace disruptive behaviors with more adaptive responses. One-on-one interventions, particularly those incorporating functional behavior assessments, have been successful in

identifying triggers and modifying behavior accordingly. were also found to be effective. These plans included strategies tailored to each child's specific needs, such as redirecting attention when disruptive behaviors emerged. One special education staff member noted, "We developed personalized strategies for each student, and we saw significant improvements when these strategies were consistently applied".

Lastly, collaboration between teachers, parents, and mental health professionals is essential for a holistic approach to managing maladaptive behavior. Consistency between home and school settings significantly improves behavioral outcomes, as students benefit from a unified strategy across different environments. Schools that actively involved parents in behavioral intervention strategies observed better progress among students. Additionally, engaging mental health professionals in designing and implementing support programs ensures that interventions address both the educational and psychological needs of students. in addressing maladaptive behaviors comprehensively. Schools that actively involved parents in behavioral management strategies observed better outcomes. "When parents reinforce the same techniques at home, students show more progress at school," a psychologist stated . Training programs for teachers on behavior management were also recommended to equip them with the necessary skills to handle challenging situations effectively.

Discussion

This study highlights the multifaceted nature of maladaptive behavior in children with intellectual disabilities, reinforcing previous research that attributes these behaviors to a combination of intrinsic cognitive limitations and external environmental influences. Similar to the findings of Einfeld SI, (1996), this study confirms that children with intellectual disabilities often struggle with emotional regulation, leading to disruptive behaviors such as physical aggression, self-injury, and withdrawal from social interactions. The inability to effectively express emotions due to communication barriers emerged as a primary trigger, aligning with existing literature that emphasizes the link between frustration, limited expressive language skills, and maladaptive responses. Study by Asgar et al., (2025) find positive relationships between knowledge, attitudes, and practices, with knowledge showing a slightly stronger correlation with practices. These findings underscore the critical need for interventions that focus on enhancing communication abilities as a means of reducing behavioral challenges.

Consistent with Kranak et al., (2024), this study also found that social isolation plays a significant role in exacerbating maladaptive behaviors. Children who lacked positive peer interactions or experienced bullying displayed increased withdrawal and repetitive behaviors, which further hindered their social development. The evidence from this study supports the notion that structured peer mentoring programs and social skills training can serve as effective preventive measures, promoting inclusivity and reducing the occurrence of maladaptive responses. While previous research has established that peer relationships are influential in shaping behavior (Wiener, 2014), this study extends the discussion by demonstrating how structured interventions specifically designed for children with intellectual disabilities can mitigate social exclusion and foster adaptive behaviors.

Another crucial finding aligns with Bai (2023), who argued that community-based support is essential in managing behavioral issues. This study corroborates that schools that collaborate with mental health

professionals, social workers, and community organizations experience better outcomes in behavior management. By integrating external resources, schools can address not only academic challenges but also the psychological and emotional needs of students. While previous research primarily focused on the role of educators in behavior management, this study emphasizes the significance of a multi-tiered approach that extends beyond the school setting. This finding highlights the need for policies that encourage stronger collaboration between educational institutions and community-based support networks.

The results also reaffirm the importance of structured classroom environments, echoing earlier studies that suggest that consistency and predictability reduce behavioral disruptions. Classrooms with clear routines and behavioral expectations saw fewer instances of maladaptive behaviors, whereas environments with inconsistent management strategies experienced frequent disruptions. This aligns with previous studies that emphasize the effectiveness of structured teaching methods and individualized learning plans in promoting positive student engagement (Gage et al., 2018). However, this study adds further depth to the discussion by highlighting the direct correlation between teacher training in behavior management and improved classroom dynamics. Schools that invested in professional development for teachers saw a noticeable decline in behavioral issues, reinforcing the argument that educator preparedness is a crucial factor in addressing maladaptive behaviors.

Furthermore, this study contributes new insights into the role of family dynamics in shaping student behavior. Supporting prior findings that inconsistent discipline and lack of parental engagement contribute to behavioral challenges (Totsika et al., 2014), this study underscores the importance of school-family collaboration. Parents who reinforced behavioral strategies at home reported better outcomes, indicating that alignment between home and school environments is key to fostering consistency in behavioral expectations. This expands on existing literature by suggesting that parental training in behavior management techniques could serve as a valuable intervention strategy.

While this study aligns with previous research in many aspects, it also highlights the need for further exploration into the long-term impact of behavioral interventions. Future research should investigate the sustained effects of school-based programs, community partnerships, and parental involvement in shaping adaptive behaviors over time. Additionally, more studies are needed to examine how different intervention strategies can be tailored to the varying cognitive and emotional needs of children with intellectual disabilities.

Overall, this study reinforces the importance of a comprehensive, multi-tiered approach to managing maladaptive behavior in children with intellectual disabilities. By integrating structured classroom strategies, community support, peer interventions, and family engagement, schools can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. These findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on special education and behavioral management, providing new perspectives on the interconnected factors that influence student behavior.

4. Conclusion

This study highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of maladaptive behavior in children with intellectual disabilities, emphasizing the interplay between cognitive limitations, environmental influences, and intervention strategies. The findings reinforce previous research that communication barriers, inconsistent behavioral reinforcement, and lack of structured support contribute significantly to behavioral challenges. Classrooms that implemented structured teaching strategies, behavior management training for educators, and individualized intervention plans saw a noticeable reduction in disruptive behaviors, aligning with existing studies on evidence-based behavioral interventions.

Additionally, this study underscores the critical role of family involvement and community-based support systems in managing maladaptive behaviors. Schools that engaged parents in behavioral intervention strategies and collaborated with mental health professionals reported better student behavioral outcomes, highlighting the need for a multi-tiered approach. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature suggesting that consistency across home, school, and community settings is essential in fostering adaptive behaviors in children with intellectual disabilities.

Despite the alignment with prior research, this study also raises important considerations for future exploration. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess the sustained impact of various intervention strategies over time, particularly in relation to school-based programs and community partnerships. Furthermore, additional research should investigate how interventions can be tailored to the diverse cognitive and emotional profiles of children with intellectual disabilities to ensure more effective outcomes.

In conclusion, managing maladaptive behavior in children with intellectual disabilities requires a holistic and collaborative approach that integrates structured classroom environments, family engagement, peer interactions, and community-based support. Schools and policymakers must prioritize professional development for educators, strengthen school-family partnerships, and expand access to mental health resources to create more inclusive and supportive learning environments. By adopting comprehensive intervention strategies, educators and caregivers can enhance the educational experiences and long-term developmental outcomes for children with intellectual disabilities.

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