Instructional Strategy for Teaching Children with Autism in the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

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This research looks at several persons who have communication problems due to various diseases. Children with autism are one of them. Because children with autism have three basic disorders: communication, social interaction, and behavior, their communication and social interaction will undoubtedly differ from those of typical children. This research will look into instructional communication for children with autism in the classroom at Rumah Autis Depok. Rumah Autis is a social institution created to fill the gap between the demand for therapeutic locations and schools for children with autism and special needs who come from low-income households. The ethnography of communication approach was used in this research because ethnography of communication focuses on communication processes that involve language and culture. The findings of this research indicated that the communication utilized by children with autism, particularly instructional communication in the classroom, is unique and distinct. Teachers must speak firmly but not loudly or repeatedly. Therefore, the students easily understand. Children with autism are easily distracted, and thus, the teacher does not allow wearing eye-catching clothing and headscarves in class. The research encourages communication ethnographers to reflect on fieldwork issues and gives a framework for doing so, particularly when it comes to teaching children with autism.

Introduction

This research is motivated by the author's concern for children with special abilities. According to the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of 1994, a child is diagnosed as autistic when his or her speech development is slow or non-existent, and there is no attempt to compensate for communication through other means; if the child can talk, his or her speech is not for communication; they frequently use strange and repetitive language; and his or her play patterns are less varied, less imagination. In terms of onset, autism can occur from birth (classic autism) or after delivery (postnatal autism), in which one to two-year-old children demonstrate normal development. However, they are expected to slow down in the future. Autistic regression is a term used to describe such a situation. (Yuwono, 2012).

Sunu (2012) lists numerous indications of communication and language behavior that may present in children with autism to improve their communication qualities. Flat facial expressions, the absence of language or body signs, uncommon communication initiation, the absence of replicating motions or sounds, little or no speaking, parrot words, unusual speech intonation, employing unintelligible words, and limited ability to grasp and use words are among them. (Yuwono, 2012).

From the previous characteristics, parrot or echolalia is the main characteristic of children with autism as a qualitative disorder in the development of communication. An example of echolalia is that children with autism can continuously repeat a word sentence or song without understanding its meaning. This characteristic of echolalia is usually owned by young autistic persons with verbal abilities. However, the character of echolalia is not an important feature because, in the development of a general child, there is also a phase where the child begins to be able to imitate and always repeat the words that he/she just knows. To distinguish it from children with autism, parents can find out in a way whether the child understands the meaning of words heard or spoken. The sign language that includes hand signals and body gestures is one of nonverbal communication. Communication is an inseparable part of social life. Moreover, communication is possible to learn and implement strategies to overcome the problems encountered.

Because learning is linked to what a learner will achieve, it is an activity that demands an organized and systematic approach (goals and or competencies to master). As a result, a learning process that is to be implemented must begin with meticulous planning so that it can be implemented efficiently. Because every child is meant to be special and undoubtedly different from other children, the classroom learning process for children with autism is extremely beneficial in developing their self-confidence, knowing their potential, and discipline.

On behalf of Yayasan Cahaya Keluarga Fitrah, Rumah Autis Depok is one of the Rumah Autis branches. It is a social institution created to fill the gap between the demand for therapeutic locations and schools for children with autism and special needs who come from low-income households. As a result, individuals can afford charges or receive free services.

Table 1
The Services Provided by Rumah Autis Depok

No	Name of services	Range of Age	Number of Children in the Classroom	Therapist/Teacher	Remarks
1.	Therapy	Various age	One child	Therapist	Usually called one on one. 1 therapist handles 1 child.
2.	*Sekolah Kemandirian Fungsio*	1-17 years old	4-7 Children (maximum)	Teacher	Each class has 2 teachers.

	nal (SKF)				
3.	Transiti on Class	Various age	3-6 Children (maximum)	Teacher	Each class has 2 teachers.

Source: Based on observation and interview results with Informant in 2020

ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) therapy is a structured therapy program for children with autism that focuses on teaching a specific set of skills; speech therapy is a medical procedure that helps a person maximize his or her verbal abilities; sensory integration therapy is a treatment for children with autism and or children with special needs that focuses on teaching a specific set of skills for children with autism. Sensory integration is a process of recognizing, changing, and differentiating sensations from the sensory system to produce a response in the form of "Aims of Adaptive Behavior"; and occupational therapy is a form of health service to the community or patients who experience physical and or mental disorders by using exercises or activities to work on selected targets (occupation) to increase the independence of individuals in the area of daily life activities.

Table 2
Number of Classes at Rumah Autis Depok

No	Name of Class	Number of Children in the Classroom	Remarks
1.	Sekolah Kemandirian Fungsional (SKF) A (range of age 3-7 years old)	6 (consist of 5 boys; 1 girl)	N/A
2.	Sekolah Kemandirian Fungsional (SKF) B (range of age 8-14 years)	7 (consist of 7 boys)	N/A
3.	Sekolah Kemandirian Fungsional (SKF) C (range of age 15-17 years)	6 (consist of 5 boys; 1 girl)	N/A
4.	Transition Class (Various Age)	3 (consist of 3 boys)	N/A

Source: Based on observation and interview results with Informant in 2020

Method

This research is motivated by the author's concern for children with special abilities. According to the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of 1994, a child is diagnosed as autistic when his or her speech development is slow or non-existent, and there is no attempt to compensate for communication through other means; if the child can talk, his or her speech is not for communication; they frequently use strange and repetitive language; and his or her play.

This research adopted an interpretive approach with an ethnographic method; more specifically what Robert LeVine termed as "person-centered ethnography", that is,

an anthropological endeavor to develop ways of describing and analyzing human behavior, subjective experiences, and psychological processes that resemble the actual experiences (Rahmawati, Mulyana, & Safitri, 2019).

Because this research encompassed a wide range of topics and interactions, the ethnography of communication research approach was used. The ethnography of communication is distinct from anthropology, linguistics, and sociolinguistics in that it concentrates on communication activities that involve language and culture. (Kuswarno, 2011).

In researching communication instruction for children with autism, qualitative research is crucial to the ethnography of communication approach. Ethnography of communication is not the same as traditional ethnography. Kuswarno disclosed the following: "The emphasis of attention in ethnography of communication is communication behavior within a particular cultural topic, rather than the entire behavior as in ethnography. Communication behavior is defined as a person's, group's, or audience's actions or activities during the communication process, according to communication research." (Kuswarno, 2011)

The ethnography of communication starts the investigation by recognizing typical behavior and then ends it with an explanation of communication patterns in a sociocultural context. Components of communication according to the ethnography of communication are communication units that support the occurrence of a communication event. Hymes (1996) reveals a model of communication components known as SPEAKING: setting/scene, participants, ends, act sequence, keys, instrumentalities, norms of interaction, and genre. (Hymes, 2004).

Research Subjects

Volunteer teachers at Rumah Autis Depok were the research in which the researcher, looked into instructional communication that they employ in the classroom with children with autism. The research subjects were chosen because they are familiar with the process and learning problems at Rumah Autis Depok and can provide as much information as possible about the research topic, which is understanding instructional communication for children with autism spectrum disorder in the classroom. Purposive sampling was used to choose the participants. As a result, the technique was chosen to outline specific concerns or criteria.

A volunteer instructor at Rumah Autis Depok met the requirements given by the researchers as an informant in this research. Volunteers had a good understanding of instructional communication for children with autism, had worked at Rumah Autis for at least three years, and had previously taught in a classroom. The following is a list of the data:

Table 3
List of Volunteers as Selected Informants

No	Name of Volunteer	Position	Age	Year of Entry at Rumah Autis Depok
1.	Informant 1	Branch Head	55 years old	2015

2.	Informant 2	Head of Program	31 years old	2012
3.	Informant 3	Transition Class' Teacher	26 years old	2009

Source: Based on observation and interview results with Informant in 2020.

Research Objects

The focus of this research was a phenomenon in the classroom at Rumah Autis Depok involving instructional communication for children with autism. Before and after the learning process, the object observed was a setting and a location of the learning process activity for children with autism in the classroom. This refers to the revelation of objectives in the classroom based on participant observation. During the teaching and learning process in the classroom at Rumah Autis Depok every Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., some of the objects were noticed. All classrooms had equal equipment, including desks and teaching chairs, desks and chairs for children, whiteboards, adequate stationery supplies, and a few pictures or posters on the wall this was to avoid students' losing focus during the class activity.

Data Collection

Communication ethnography aims to investigate a specific cultural group based on long-term observations and the presence of researchers in the natural field. The following are some of the data collection approaches used in this research:

1. Participant Observation

The researchers used the participant observation technique to see, hear, and immediately experience the context of communication that takes place in the classroom at Rumah Autis Depok. Because it has been utilized in ethnography and anthropology for a long time, this technique is considered the main technique in communication ethnography. Because the data is acquired directly from the field, the data can be more complete and accurate with this technique. The researchers observed the participants by having sit-ins in the classroom (SKF A, B, C, and transition) on Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. for approximately 3 months without intervening.

2. In-depth Interview

The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with several volunteers at Rumah Autis Depok. The interview was used to confirm the results of observations that had been previously done. Interviews were conducted to explore participants' thoughts on several possible data that had not been fully explored through observation. This research conducted an in-depth interview with only selected informants, they were Informant 1, Informant 2, and Informant 3.

Results and Discussion

Instructional and Communication

Two terms are frequently used and are seen to have the same meaning, namely educational communication and instructional communication. However, some parties view that the two terms are different. Educational communication refers more to communication activities that take place in educational institutions. Whereas instructional communication refers to the communication process that takes place in the context of learning that takes place at existing levels and educational paths (Iriantara, 2014).

Bjekic and Zlatic's Research Results (2006) in (Iriantara, 2014) indicated communication competence is the basis for the overall professional action of the teacher. The reason is that learning is a process of socio-interactive communication. Bjekic and Zlatic proposed that teachers understand the communication process well (Iriantara, 2014).
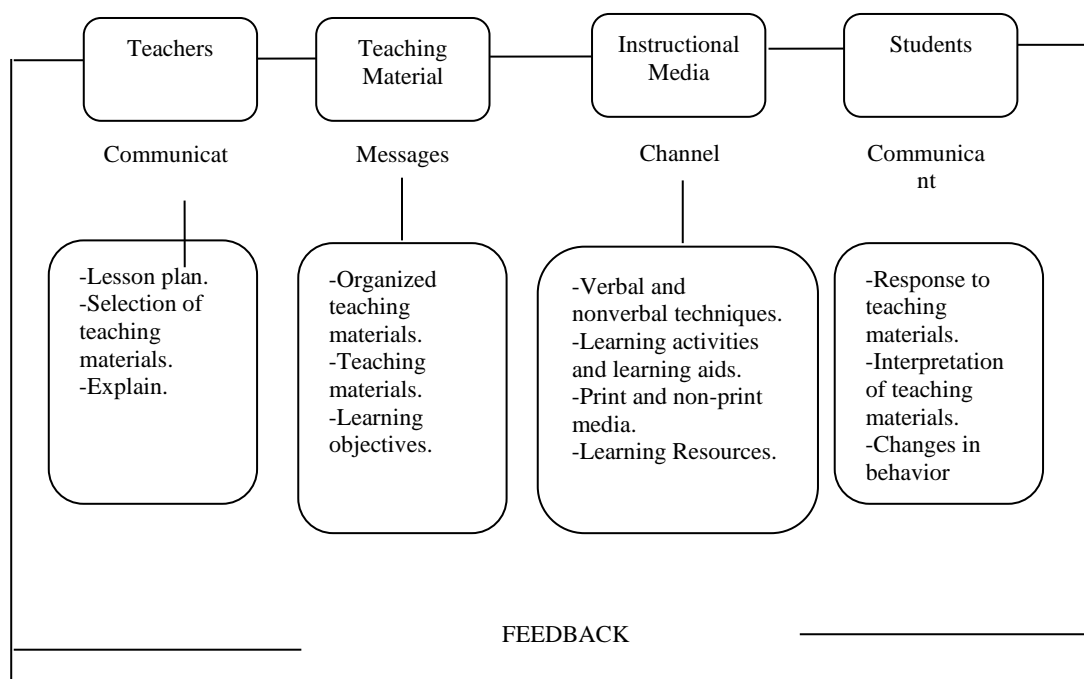

Figure 1
Learning Communication Process

Speaking Grid

An acronym model in the word of SPEAKING consists of setting/scene, participants, ends, act sequences, keys, instrumentalities, norms of interaction, and genre. The components are briefly explained below:

a. Setting: The context and setting of the communication practice, what is the context and setting of the communication practice? This section digs into two aspects of context: the actual setting in which it occurs and the scene, or the participants' perception of what occurs when the technique is in use. (Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2015) Argue that analyzing the practice's environment and scenic features helps to situate the analysis in the specific circumstances of social life.

There are 6 (six) classes at Rumah Autis Depok, consisting of 2 therapy rooms, a Transition class, an SKF A class, an SKF B class, an SKF C class plus a shared hall, 2 bathrooms, 1 storage room for musical instruments and sports equipment, 1 administration room, 1 branch headroom. Rumah Autis Depok has 3 floors, but only the 1st and 2nd floors are used. While the 3rd floor is still empty. In the long term, it is planned to be a BLK class.

In class, children with autism benefit from dynamic instructional communication. There are 2-5 possibilities per session. When the class is set up in a circle, the teacher is usually in front of the class or behind the class. They frequently sit on the floor when they're having a storytelling session.
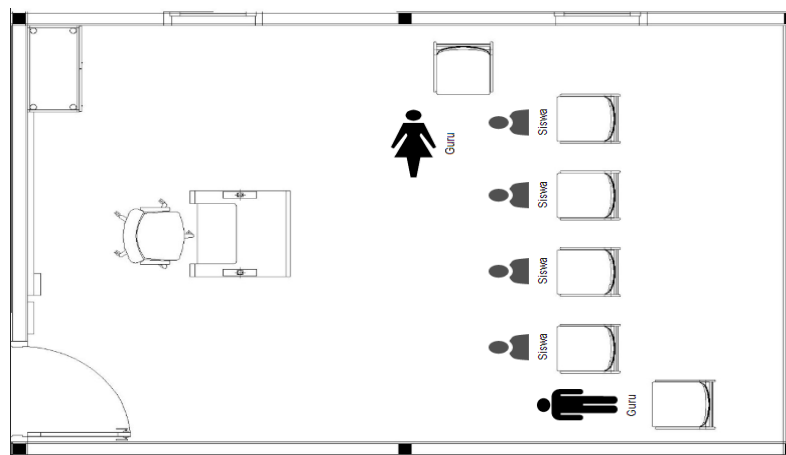

Figure 2
Transition Classroom Setting

b. Participants: Who are the people who are taking part in this experiment? The key concept here is participant, which signals a significant shift in how we think about communication as an event in which people participate (in the event). This differs from traditional encoding and decoding models, as well as others that initially focus on message senders and receivers. What happens if something as simple as "reading the newspaper" is considered an event? Who are the people who are taking part in that practice? (Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2015). The participants of this research are 22 children with special abilities, the majority of whom have autism, at Rumah Autis Depok, and 10 volunteers (teachers) who teach at Rumah Autis Depok.

Figure 3
Documentation during Classroom Learning at Rumah Autis

c. Ends: What are the ends of this exercise? This section asks for two things: the participants' practice goals and the desired outcomes. Many people are familiar with an off-color joke whose purpose is to entertain the offending conclusion in a joke-telling activity. Communication practice, generally, may target some goals, yet attain other outcomes (intended and not) (Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2015). One of the results is functional independence. As a result, children with autism have fundamental independence, such as being able to dress themselves and bathe independently, as well as advanced independence, such as being able to read, write, and even talk, and working independently to earn money, as most adults do when they are adults.No more tantrum, meltdown or the worst was self-injury.

d. Act Sequence: In and for this activity, what act sequence is involved? Social interaction necessitates the practice. When does it occur, and in what order does it occur? What are the substance and forms of the practice, as well? This component invites a close examination of the practice's sequential organization, message content, and form (Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2015). Instructional communication is employed with children with autism, and it must be done in a firm but not loud or even screaming voice. It must also be done regularly. Rumah Autis follows the Special Needs School curriculum. However, when it is applied to the students, it refers to each student's ability. PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) and social stories are also needed to support teachers in the classroom. PECS and social stories as a tool in communicating.

e. Keys, how is the practice being keyed? What is the communication practice's emotional pitch, feeling, or spirit? In terms of funerals, the vast majority are somber and solemn. Other events, such as discussion shows, can be geared toward a lighter tone. This component raises and analyzes questions about how practices are keyed and how the key can alter from moment to moment (Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2015). The learning process for children with autism is unquestionably distinct from that of typically developing children. When dealing with children with autism,

patience is required, as they require more time to adjust to their surroundings, particularly new friends or teachers. Moreover, children with autism are easily distracted by unique images, eye-catching colors, and objects. Therefore, in the class, it is quite "quiet" from these various attributes to avoid distraction for children with autism.

f. Instrumentalities: What is the instrument or channel that this communication technique is employing? The oral modality may be required or forbidden in favor of a certain gesture or body movement. Is it better to use a technological channel or not? Should the exercise be done in writing, over the phone, or in person, with music or chanting? (Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2015) Added the range of instruments used to create practice and each manner they were interpreted into the analysis. The message delivered in the instructional communication process must be simple, and it cannot be repeated word for word. Not infrequently most children with autism use nonverbal language because they cannot speak well. Even though children who are good at reading do not always indicate their ability to communicate in two ways, most children with autism communicate in one direction.

g. Norms of Interaction: What norms are in effect when communication is conducted in this manner and this community? This component distinguishes between two types of norms that may be important to a communication practice: what is done as a matter of habit (e.g., few people vote) and what is the proper thing to do (e.g., voting) (e.g., one should vote in every election). The morally infused and normative features of communication practices can be constructively differentiated from normality standards. This component is guided by a second distinction: norms for interaction can be distinguished from norms of interpretation. The norm for interaction can be formulated as a rule for how one should properly interact when conducting the practice of concern: e.g., one should respect one's elders. The norm for interpretation can be formulated as a rule for what practice means. Both norms are analyzed through this component (Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2015). Because children with autism have problems in communication, social interaction, and behavior, there are only norms of interaction between students and teachers. It happens since interactions between students are very rare. These norms are like reading prayers before and after learning, kissing the teacher's hand when entering class, greeting when going in and out of class, and so on.

h. Genre, is there a genre of communication of which this practice is an instance? This might involve identifying the practice as a type of formal genre such as verbal dueling, a riddle, or a narrative. As a result, the formal genres' qualities become crucial to its study. Alternatively, the practice could be viewed as a component of a folk genre and studied as such (Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2015). Humor, inspiration, and relaxation are the genres utilized in practically all lessons at Rumah Autis Depok, so the children do not feel burdened instead of having fun.

Instructional Communication for Children with Autism

Communication plays an important role in human life. Watzlawick et al (1967) assert that "we can not communicate", even when praying. The word or term of communication comes from the Latin 'community' which means to divide in the sense of dividing ideas, ideas, or thoughts, communication in English, communication from Dutch. Communication in Latin comes from the word 'communis' which means the same. The word 'same' means equal in meaning (Syam, 2016). Communication will take place well if the same perspective between communicators and communicants. From a psychological perspective, Hovland, Janis, and Kelly define communication as a process that allows one to convey stimuli (usually by using verbal symbols) to change the behavior of others. In this context psychology tries to analyze the communication between individuals, how the message delivered becomes a stimulus that gives rise to responses from other individuals, and how symbols can be meaningful and change the behavior of others.

Currently, instructional communication is getting extraordinary attention. This is motivated by the importance of choosing ways of communication in the learning process. Therefore, learning activities achieve goals effectively and efficiently. Communication is one of the critical success factors in the learning process. Effective communication correlates with the level of learning success. The quality of learning is influenced by the effectiveness of the communication that occurs in it. Effective communication in learning is the process of transforming messages in the form of science and technology from teachers to students. According to (Pramana, Syafa'at, Khotimah, & Susarno, 2024), there is a significant difference in students with strong teaching talents compared to students with weak teaching talents in their learning outcomes. In addition, students also understand that through independent learning, they would accomplish what they are learning. (Talok, Erom, Djehatu, & Panis, 2023).

Teaching and learning is a process of communication between teachers and students. Communication processes that may occur during the teaching and learning process are unidirectional communication, two-way communication, and multi-directional communication. (Suyanto & Jihad, 2013). Learning is an activity that involves a person's effort to obtain knowledge, skills, and positive values by utilizing various sources for learning. The most important element in learning activities is the learning process. Rumah Autis Depok used IEP (Individual Education Program) combined with TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children) to control and evaluation related to learning activities, especially in the classroom.

However, based on observations, researchers find that the learning process for children with special needs, especially autism, is very different from most children because children with autism rely more on nonverbal communication than verbal communication. That is because children with autism have behavioral disorders, socialization disorders, and communication disorders. This statement is similar to that of Powell and Powell who say that students with disabilities often present physical, social,

and academic challenges to the classroom teacher. Students with learning disabilities mostly lack social and communicative competence (Powell & Powell, 2010).

Possible activities to conduct a learning process in the classroom for children with autism are structured teaching, modification, accommodation, and visual aids (Anastasia, 2019). Rumah Autis Depok is one of the Rumah Autis' branches on behalf of Yayasan Cahaya Keluarga Fitrah. It is a social institution established to bridge the need for therapy sites and schools for children with autism and children with special needs from poor families. Therefore, they can afford costs or get a free charge. (Autis, 2019).

The informants said that the curriculum at Rumah Autis Depok is adopted from Special Needs School but when applied to the students it refers to each student's ability. For instance, Mr. Ali and Ms. Villa (Teacher of SKF C) gave the task of writing to Aan (student of SKF C) and Rizky (student of SKF C); the task of matching the image to the right picture to Ita (student of SKF C) and Farrel (student of SKF C); the task of coloring the image to Augie (student of SKF C) and Fahmi (student of SKF C).

The communication, especially for instructional communication in the classroom, used for children with autism is very unique and distinctive, Teachers must speak firmly but not loudly or repeatedly. Therefore, the students easily understand. Children with autism are easily distracted, and thus, the teacher does not allow wearing eye-catching clothing and headscarves in class. It must be reduced by colorful pictures or displays. Of 22 students at Rumah Autis Depok, only 5 of them can speak while the others still, mostly, use non-verbal language. Meanwhile, the teaching and learning processes use more tools. In all the limitations possessed by children with autism, some experts have made an auxiliary communication tool that can facilitate children with autism to communicate with those around them.

Approximately 50% of children with autism cannot speak at Rumah Autis Depok, mostly included in the category of low function, and they tend to be very visual. Although they can write and listen very well, their writing ability does not guarantee that they can speak well. Based on the explanation above, the researcher can summarize the pattern of communication for children with autism at Rumah Autis as below:
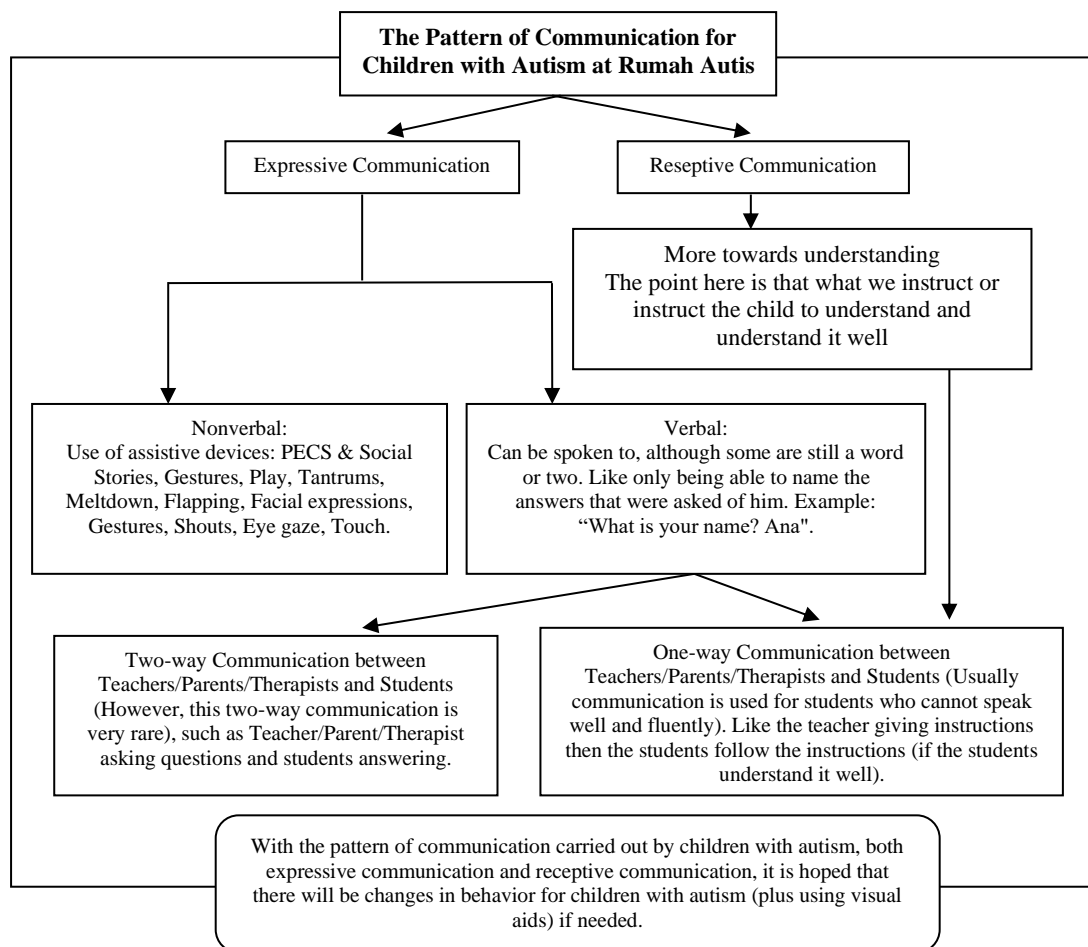
Figure 4
The Pattern of Communication for Children with Autism at Rumah Autis

Conclusion

Currently, instructional communication is getting extraordinary attention. This is motivated by the importance of choosing ways of communication in the learning process. Therefore, learning activities achieve goals effectively and efficiently. Communication is one of the critical success factors in the learning process. Effective communication correlates with the level of learning success. However, based on observations, it is found that the learning process for children with special needs, especially children with autism, is very different from most children because children with autism rely more on nonverbal communication than verbal communication.

Researchers have discovered that the learning process for children with exceptional needs, particularly autism, is extremely different from that of normal children, based on observations, because individuals with autism rely more on nonverbal communication than verbal communication. This is due to the fact that children with autism have behavioral, socialization, and communication issues. According to the informants, the curriculum of Rumah Autis Depok was adapted from a Special Needs School, but when applied to the children, it refers to each student's capacity.

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