
Alternative teaching behavior management strategies for children with autism: An approach based on functional behavioral assessment

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate effective behavior management strategies for children on the autism spectrum using a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) approach. Research highlights behavioral challenges exhibited by children with autism. These include difficulties with social interaction, communication deficits, sensory sensitivities, repetitive behaviors, and resistance to change. The research focused on a single child with autism, aged six years 11 months, identified as DT. This study used a case study research with a qualitative approach involving data collection through observation, interviews, and document analysis. The results show that the FBA approach can provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence the behavior of children with ASD. Behavior management strategies based on FBA consist of identifying individual needs, developing appropriate intervention programs, and ongoing monitoring for promoting individualized interventions, early intervention, effective teaching practices, and evidence-based practice.

Keywords: *teaching behavior management, children with autism, functional behavior assessment*

How to Cite (APA 7th Style): Sukinah & Taqiyah, D. B. (2024). Behavior management strategies in children with autism: A functional behavioral assessment approach. *Jurnal Kependidikan*, 8(1), 118-128. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21831/jk.v8i1.66775>

INTRODUCTION

Autism, also known as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a developmental disorder that affects various aspects of life, including behavior. Children with autism often display repetitive and restricted behaviors, as well as difficulties in managing their emotions and social interactions. Autism is a complex developmental issue that makes it challenging for children with autism to adapt to their environment (Wahyu *et al.*, 2018; Ishartiwi *et al.*, 2023; Reichow & Volkmar, 2010). Some typical behavioral characteristics of autistic children include clapping, waving their hands, kicking and running, moving their bodies back and forth quickly, and making sounds by repeating words or just making sounds (Achmad & Jeremy, 2019, p. 195). Therefore, it is essential for parents and teachers to have a deep understanding of effective behavior management strategies to support children with autism.

Teachers must recognize characteristic-matching learning for each student based on their disabilities and special needs (Ishartiwi *et al.*, 2022, p. 216). Managing the behavior of children with autism is a complex and vital challenge in education and daily life. Children with autism may exhibit withdrawn behavior, somatic complaints, anxiety/depression,

social problems, thinking problems, attention problems, problem behavior, and aggressive behavior (Bauminger *et al.*, 2010, p. 101). Problematic behavior in these children is often repetitive and stereotyped, such as tapping fingers, swinging arms, or self-injury (Theodora & Mahabbati, 2019, p. 59). Therefore, effective behavior management is crucial in helping autistic children develop their potential, participate in daily life, and achieve independence appropriate to their age. The behavior of autistic children can be divided into two categories: excessive behavior, which includes hyperactivity, tantrums, and self-harm, and deficit behavior, which may cause speech disorders or a lack of social behavior, such as laughing or crying for no reason and daydreaming (Nurhidayati, 2015, p. 123). Reducing problematic behavior can prevent undesirable impacts (Alviana, 2018, p. 699).

When it comes to managing behavior in children with autism, it is not just about addressing unwanted behavior; it is also crucial to understand the underlying causes, develop better skills, and create a supportive environment that promotes positive development. Common behaviors in children with autism include unintentional, unregulated, and undirected actions such as walking, running, climbing, twisting, jumping, swinging, screaming, and aggressive or self-injuring behavior. They may also experience tantrums, difficulty concentrating, and repetitive behavior (Amanullah, 2022, p. 9); (Ni'matuzahroh & Nurhamida, 2016, p. 33). Additionally, children with autism often struggle to interact with others who may not understand social norms, such as sharing toys, maintaining eye contact, or recognizing facial expressions.

Children diagnosed with autism often exhibit limited and repetitive behavior, as stated (Ridha, 2017, p. 55). Such behaviors include arm swinging, spinning, and repeating certain words or phrases. Such behavior may be a coping mechanism for children with autism to deal with anxiety or express discomfort, as mentioned (Mazefsky *et al.*, 2013, p. 23). Effective behavior management is essential in helping children with ASD develop their potential and participate in everyday life. Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is a useful approach for managing the behavior of children with autism (Gresham *et al.*, 2001, p. 159). It involves understanding the contingency between behavior, the conditions that cause it, and its outcomes.

FBA is a systematic approach that helps understand the reasons behind undesirable behavior and develop effective intervention strategies. FBA is a procedural and systematic behavioral assessment method used to understand signs of behavioral disorders (Steege & Watson, 2009). FBA provides hypotheses about the relationship between specific events and environmental behavioral patterns (Theodora & Mahabbati, 2019, p. 59). In managing the behavior of children with autism, it is essential to understand their characteristics. FBA comprises three strategic approaches: changing antecedent variables, consequent variables, and teaching alternative behavior (Muwakhidah, 2014, p. 3).

Each child with ASD is unique, with different needs and preferences. One of the traits of children with autism is stubborn behavior, which is characterized by a rigid willingness to act or be in the same situation repeatedly, as mentioned by Nurfadhillah *et al.* (2021, p. 462) and Mazefsky *et al.* (2013, p. 2). If someone tries to change their behavior, even a little, or if the child feels that their ritual behavior is being disturbed, they may become outraged and have tantrums. Therefore, a practical approach must be tailored to meet their specific

requirements. Behavior management addresses unwanted behavior and provides children with special needs with the social, emotional, and adaptive skills they need to succeed in everyday life. Good behavior management must consider the child's needs and provide equal opportunities for their development and success.

As stated above, FBA is a systematic approach to understanding the reasons behind unwanted behavior and developing appropriate intervention strategies. The FBA approach involves identifying undesirable behaviors, understanding the causes of those behaviors, and developing suitable intervention plans to assist in developing social, communication, and academic skills. For instance, in the case of DT, he communicates his desire for an object or toy non-verbally, such as by pointing or pulling. Additionally, DT still experiences difficulties answering simple questions, such as his name, feelings, or whether he has received something.

Functional Behavior Assessment, also known as FBA, considers that each child with autism is unique, and therefore, interventions must be customized to meet their specific needs. The primary advantages of FBA include a comprehensive understanding of the child's behavior, the ability to create appropriate interventions, and a focus on positive reinforcement and alternative skill development. This article will emphasize the significance of observing and having an in-depth comprehension of children with autism when devising effective behavior management methods, specifically Functional Behavior Assessment or FBA.

METHOD

The research used a qualitative case study approach. The case study research was chosen because the researcher wanted to understand the background of a problem or individual interactions within a social unit or group of individuals in-depth, completely, holistically, intensively, and naturalistically (Yusuf, 2014, p. 339). According to (Yin, 2018, p. 33), case study research is conducted when the research question "how" or "why" has little or no control over the contemporary behavioral events and phenomena of a case. (Creswell, 2012, p. 465) states that in case study research, researchers focus more on exploring limited cases, such as events, processes, or individuals, based on extensive data collection. This research uses a case study because the research aims to understand the dynamics of behavior in children on the autism spectrum using an FBA approach.

The study focused on a single child with autism, identified as DT, who was six years and 11 months old. Previous examinations at DT Hospital indicated that the child faced developmental challenges in social interaction, communication, motor skills, adaptation, and behavior. Data collection techniques in case study research, as outlined by (Yin, 2018, p. 155), include documentation (such as letters, agendas, event reports, research results, and evaluation results), archival records (like service records, maps, survey data, and personal records such as diaries and calendars), interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical devices (such as technological devices, tools, or instruments). Based on this opinion, the research techniques used in this research are documentation techniques (which are a method of collecting data from daily notes,

behavioral assessment instrument checklist documents, videos of intervention program activities), archival records (based on the results of initial observations, implementation of interventions and evaluations). Behavior, direct observation (to record the entire implementation of the intervention program), interviews (to find problems more openly, where the interviewee is asked for opinions and ideas), and physical devices (in the form of instruments). At the beginning of this research, children with autism were in the unique education laboratory, which was then examined according to the principles of FBA behavioral assessment. Then, an intervention design was formulated based on the presentation of the assessment results of the child's problem behavior.

The data analysis technique this research uses describes the case and its setting in detail (Moedzakir, 2010, p. 175). The research started with an assessment stage to identify the child's obstacles. During this stage, initial testing was conducted using instruments prepared by the PLB FIP UNY Lab team. The next stage involved 20 intervention sessions, and the final stage included analyzing data based on the intervention results, interview findings, documents, observation results, and archival recordings.

The research utilized a descriptive-qualitative design, collecting data through observation, interviews, and document analysis. This method is chosen because it provides a deep and contextual understanding of the studied phenomenon. According to Krisyantono, this technique describes and interprets the meaning of the collected information, paying attention to and correcting as many aspects of the situation being studied as possible to obtain a general and complete picture of the actual situation. Similarly, Winartha (2006) states that the qualitative descriptive method involves analyzing, describing, and summarizing different situations and information collected through interviews or observations about the problems being studied that occur in the field. The descriptive-qualitative approach is used for this research as it focuses on natural objects (Sugiyono, 2015, p. 15).

The study focused on a single child with autism, identified as DT, who was six years and 11 months old. Previous examinations at DT Hospital indicated that the child faced developmental challenges in social interaction, communication, motor skills, adaptation, and behavior. Data collection used in this study includes several methods. *First*, Observation - The researcher observed DT's behavior in the classroom and social environment, noting responses to various situations, social interactions, and the implementation of existing behavior management strategies. *Second*, Interviews - The parents and teachers were interviewed to understand better DT's characteristics and the behavior management strategies used at home and school. *Third*, Analysis of documents - The behavior management plans, child development records, and significant events during the intervention were analyzed to understand DT's behavior management progress.

In this study, theme analysis was conducted on data obtained from interviews and observations to identify key themes related to DT's behavior and effective management strategies. Data triangulation, which involves using data from various sources, such as observations, interviews, and document analysis, is used to validate findings and gain a more comprehensive understanding.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The DT intervention was carried out over 24 meetings, each lasting 90 minutes. The children were active and cheerful during these meetings, as observed by DT. Furthermore, DT was able to follow instructions well, such as "da-da," "take," "sit," and "put." However, DT still struggles with verbal communication and has difficulty understanding simple instructions like sitting, imitating, and hand-flapping behavior. Additionally, DT has been unable to follow the activity roll, as evidenced by his happiness in walking or moving. He also communicates non-verbally when he wants an object or toy, usually by pointing or pulling. DT struggles to respond to simple questions such as his name, how he is doing, or whether he has been delivered.

Observation, interview, and assessment techniques (Denver II Instrument) were used for initial data collection. The results of child development screening using Denver II are shown in Table 1.

The intervention implemented the DIR Floortime principle to improve the quality of DT's interactions with companions, using shaping strategies. The DIR Floortime principle aims to build a strong foundation for children to develop the capacity to focus attention (Larasati *et al.*, 2017, p. 35). The intervention also occasionally conditions DT to sit in a chair. Due to DT's difficulty in verbal communication, alternative communication methods such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) are used, which involves verbal symbols on cards attached to a communication board (Vistasari & Patria, 2019, p. 95). Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is also used to help communication interventions be more effective. AAC can complement and replace speaking and writing (augmentative) and communicate in addition to speaking (alternative), helping children with language disorders (Brignell *et al.*, 2018, p. 78).

The intervention program focuses on social interaction, communication, and fine motor skills using various manipulative media such as fruit, animals, and AAC. Individual approaches and shaping strategies are used. Shaping is the formation of new behavior that has not previously been displayed by providing systematic and direct reinforcement for each behavior displayed (Komalasari, 2016, p. 37). The shaping technique is carried out repeatedly with the aim of the subject getting used to specific conditioning to automatically continue what has become his habit. Autistic children learn better when the material being taught can be simulated and visualized in a natural context, so learning must be concrete or semi-concrete (Sukinah, 2022, p. 225). DT's strength is that he is cheerful and able to understand simple receptive language, such as taking off his shoes, putting them on the shelf, picking them up, and making eye contact when given simple instructions, even for a moment.

Children with autism can experience a range of behavioral challenges, including repetitive behavior, limited communication skills, and difficulties with social interaction (Desiningrum, 2016, p. 27). To address these challenges, a FBA approach was implemented to help the child overcome them and achieve appropriate independence for their age. Based on interviews, DT could follow instructions during intervention activities with assistance. During the assessment, DT did not exhibit excessive behavior or emotions such as screaming or crying. However, DT was observed to easily get bored and switch attention

from one activity to another, requiring an individualized approach. DT also tended to wander around the room without clear direction and had difficulty following all the activities that needed to be done. Additionally, DT did not follow simple one-step instructions spontaneously. Based on the FBA procedures, it was found that DT exhibits problematic behavior patterns.

Table 1
Child development screening

Sector	Child Response
Social personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare and retrieve food with assistance. - Brush your teeth with assistance. - Dress with help - Wear a T-shirt with help. - Not able to name friends. - Able to wash and dry hands with assistance
Fine motor skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modeled a rectangular image with the assistance - Selected longer lines with assistance - Copied + symbol with assistance - Modeled a circle with assistance - Wiggled the thumb with assistance - Imitated vertical lines with assistance - Was able to arrange a tower of 4 cubes independently - Scribbled for approximately 2 minutes with assistance - Moved the cube independently - Held ick-ick independently
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Named four colors in English with assistance - Does not yet understand the meaning of words when speaking.
Gross motoric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can stand on one leg for 3 seconds with assistance. - Can jump on one leg with assistance. - Can do long jumps with assistance. - Can throw a handball up with help. - Can jump independently. - Can kick the ball forward independently. - Can walk upstairs independently. - Can run independently

Identifying the cause of DT's behavior is crucial in developing an appropriate intervention plan. Such a plan may include positive reinforcement for desirable behavior, removal of reinforcement for undesirable behavior, and developing alternative skills. Positive reinforcement involves strengthening and increasing the likelihood of a particular behavior reoccurring. In the second stage of the intervention, the implementation continued by providing stimulation while keeping away toys that DT likes. Whenever DT asks for

something by pulling his companion's hand, he is directed to say "want." This stimulation is repeated until DT can say "want" and is given the desired object, followed by a high five. For autistic children, repetition is necessary for learning due to attention span problems. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain their interest in learning material. In this intervention, miniature media such as "fish" and "apples" were used by the companion. The companion would show the object to DT and repeatedly say "fish" until DT can imitate it and is rewarded accordingly.

During ten intervention activities, DT could follow instructions from his companion, whose identity was identified by DT. It led to a calmer behavior and a better understanding of the location of the intervention room, resulting in DT feeling more comfortable during the sessions. The series of stimulation programs, including "Come here, DT, sit down," "Take red," and "Match red," proved to be effective in increasing DT's engagement and participation. DT enjoys being joked with, such as being tickled when he completes an activity well. As DT is a moody child, prompts, short breaks, and diversion to free activities that DT likes are necessary. When DT's mood changes, tickling is done to cheer him up and bring back his enthusiasm.

The FBA is a valuable tool for caregivers such as parents or teachers to better understand what triggers DT's behavior. By understanding these triggers, caregivers can design more effective interventions to help DT manage their behavior. The main goal of FBA is to identify things that act as reinforcers of DT's behavior. These reinforcers can be either positive or negative social reinforcers from a person interacting with DT or automatic reinforcers produced by DT's behavior. The idea behind FBA is that by identifying these reinforcing events, interventions can be designed to eliminate existing problem behavior and increase adaptive behavior by modifying these contingencies. The FBA approach emphasizes positive and proactive intervention in problem behavior, as identified in Muwakhidah's research. The behavioral intervention design was developed based on the problem behavior patterns identified through the FBA process, such as resistance or refusal to engage in learning tasks. Problem behavior can be corrected by teaching the child the target behavior based on a complete description of the problem behavior pattern.

In 24 intervention activities, DT looks like a friendly child who loves to interact with people. When he meets someone, he greets them with a wave and a smile. Everyone around him has made it a habit to say "hi" or "hello" to him, and DT has become accustomed to shaking hands with his friends. He even likes to shake hands and kiss the hands of people he has just met. DT has no trouble following simple instructions such as "take," "put," "imitate (movement)," "sit," or "hold." His strength lies in putting together puzzles and matching shapes. His companion often uses this activity to engage him by giving him puzzle pieces and asking him to sit independently in a chair. Once he has completed a puzzle, the companion redirects him to other activities, such as holding stationery or developing his language skills with picture cards, before giving him another puzzle to work on.

Every child with autism is unique, and it's crucial to understand their special needs, interests, and sensitivities to manage their behavior effectively. Children with autism often struggle with communication, but AAC methods such as visual cards, communication devices, or sign language can help them communicate more effectively (Odom *et al.*, 2010,

p. 276). These methods can help them express themselves and alleviate frustration. Children with autism often feel more comfortable with structure and consistent routines. Implementing a structured daily schedule and providing notification before changes can help manage their anxiety and reduce unwanted behavior (Mirnawati & Amka, 2019, pp. 4-5).

Positive reinforcement is an effective way to encourage desired behavior in children with autism. DT, for example, responds well to reinforcement with words such as "great," "smart," "hurray," "applause," "smile," and "high five." It motivates him to participate in directed activities and encourages him to continue exhibiting positive behavior. FBA is an effective way to understand the underlying reasons behind unwanted behavior in children with autism. By understanding the causes, teachers and parents can develop strategies to manage this behavior effectively. Parents play a crucial role in managing the behavior of their child with autism, and their involvement is essential in implementing effective behavior management strategies. Behavior management in children with autism requires a holistic, evidence-based, and individualized approach to provide a comprehensive view of behavior management.

CONCLUSION

The intervention incorporates various evidence-based strategies, such as the DIR Floortime principle, PECS, and AAC, to enhance the quality of interactions and communication skills in children with autism. It suggests that a comprehensive approach targeting different areas of development can effectively address the complex needs of children with autism. The intervention program acknowledges each child's individual strengths and challenges and tailors the intervention accordingly. It underscores the significance of personalized approaches in autism intervention, as what works for one child may not work for another. Using positive reinforcement and shaping techniques in the intervention program demonstrates effective strategies for promoting desirable behaviors and skills in children with autism. It underscores the importance of employing positive and proactive approaches in behavior management. The involvement of caregivers, such as parents and teachers, in understanding and implementing behavior management strategies is crucial. This collaboration ensures consistency across different environments and maximizes the effectiveness of interventions. The intervention program emphasizes the importance of providing a structured and predictable environment for children with autism, which can help reduce anxiety and support their learning and engagement.

FBA is a procedural approach to managing the behavior of children with autism. It enables mentors to understand, plan, and implement effective strategies to help DTs reach their potential and better participate in daily life. FBA is an evidence-based approach that supports positive development and empowers DTs to overcome obstacles that prevent them from succeeding. To create a holistic approach to behavior management, working with a multidisciplinary team is important. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of DT's behavior and helps develop effective strategies to address their unique needs. Functional Behavioral Interventions (FBA) are designed to help avoid approaches that solely focus on "suppressing" behavior without understanding its underlying reasons. By

identifying the underlying causes, FBA can help develop targeted interventions to address the behavior effectively, allowing DT to thrive and achieve their full potential.

This research significantly contributes to our understanding of the Functional Behavioral Intervention approach and its effectiveness in managing the behavior of children with autism. The results of the study have practical implications for the development of appropriate and sustainable intervention programs for children on the Autism spectrum. This research provides valuable insight into practitioners' views on the challenges and opportunities associated with using a FBA approach in daily practice. By understanding these challenges and opportunities, practitioners can develop effective strategies tailored to each child's unique needs. In conclusion, the FBA approach has the potential to improve the quality of life of children with autism through evidence-based behavior management. The approach provides intervention planning tailored to the specific needs of DT, avoiding a "one size fits all" approach. By developing effective strategies tailored to each child's unique needs, practitioners can help children with autism achieve their full potential and lead fulfilling lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to DT's parents and the Head of the PLB laboratory, Faculty of Education and Psychology.

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