


# Identifying Parental Learning Assistance for Children with Disabilities During COVID-19 Pandemic

Wiwin Hendriani , Faculty of Psychology Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia

Corresponding author:  
Wiwin Hendriani,  
wiwin.hendriani@psikologi.  
unair.ac.id

Article history:  
Received: 22 October 2023  
Revised: 18 November 2023  
Accepted: 21 November 2023

Published online at  
ijds.ub.ac.id  
Copyright © 2023 Author(s)  
Licensed under CC BY NC



## Abstract

This research was motivated by the many difficulties and problems faced by parents of children with disabilities in accompanying their children to study at home during the Covid-19 pandemic. Difficulties with learning assistance faced by parents of children with disabilities, if not immediately addressed, will have long-lasting impacts and give rise to other problems, such as children becoming increasingly hampered in mastering learning goals, lack of discipline, and the emergence of various new habits and behavior patterns in children that are less adaptive. The participants in this research were 20 parents of children with disabilities, consisting of 8 mothers of children with intellectual disabilities and 12 mothers of children with an autism spectrum disorder. This research approach is a qualitative case study. The data mining method uses focused group discussion, observation, and online interviews. The collected data was analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. The results of data analysis found 14 themes regarding the steps taken by parents in assisting children's learning. The 14 themes were then categorized into 3 groups of assistance based on their objectives. These results can be used as a basis for formulating strategies to empower parents of children with other disabilities, in optimizing their involvement in the child's learning process.

*Keywords: Learning Assistance, Children with Disabilities, Covid-19 Pandemic, Parenting*

## 1. Research Background

Parental involvement and assistance are essential factors for the success of children's education (Ferara & Ferara, 2005; Park et al., 2011; Wortham, 2013), especially for children with disabilities who have different developmental conditions from their peers. This research began with concern for the many difficulties and problems faced by parents of children with disabilities in accompanying their children to study at home during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Studying completely from home during the pandemic is not easy for parents and children, causing both of them to be vulnerable to stress (Setyaningsih, 2020). A learning process that is completely carried out online has never existed before, so neither parents

nor children have sufficient experience and preparation to do it (Purwanto et al., 2020). Therefore, parents must spend extra time assisting their children in learning, especially children who have special conditions. This is because children with disabilities cannot easily focus their attention in participating in learning via online platforms. It becomes increasingly difficult for them to be active in learning, and increasingly require help from parents (Branstetter, 2020). Parental support and assistance determine the extent to which children with disabilities can optimize their learning at home.

According to previous research, the learning assistance that parents need to do is not only in helping children understand the learning materials, but also includes managing structured daily routines for children (Szabo et al., 2020), providing examples of psychological management and self-regulation (Coyne et al., 2020), balancing the routines through outdoor physical activity (Dunton et al., 2020), facilitating positive social interactions in alternative ways (Bartlett et al., 2020), strengthening children's understanding of the pandemic (Einspieler & Marschik, 2020), strengthening and regulating children's emotions in learning (Bartlett et al., 2020; Szabo et al., 2020).

These additional tasks significantly add to the responsibility of parents with special needs children. Not a few parents subsequently report difficulties in managing time between work and accompanying children to study as well as being a substitute for teachers at home, having a limited understanding of children's learning materials, lacking references on the variations of fun learning activities at home, and so on, which leads to the emergence of stress, especially to parents of children with disabilities (Hendriani et al., 2020; Limbers et al., 2020; Yulianingsih et al., 2020).

Difficulties in learning assistance that are faced by parents of children with disabilities and are not immediately resolved will have long-term consequences on the emergence of other problems, such as the risk of further delays for children to be able to master learning objectives, the lack of discipline, as well as the emergence of various new habits and behaviour patterns of less adaptive children. Reports in various mass media have also recorded many cases of unpreparedness in adapting the learning process for children with disabilities at home, which has resulted in parents feeling increasingly worried because of the large psychological burden, making it more challenging to provide learning assistance to children (Kakroo, 2021). Such learning situations in turn also bring psychological pressure on children, giving rise to various anxieties and the dominance of negative emotions which can harm their personal development.

However, the facts found in society do not completely lead to negative conditions. Although some parents of children with disabilities experience significant difficulties, others can show quite good adaptation, characterized by various steps for managing burdens, responsibilities and learning support strategies that are more planned and effective when compared to the majority of parents of children with disabilities. others (Hendriani et al., 2020; Motherly, 2020; Susilowati & Azzasyofia, 2020). Based on this background, this research aims to identify various learning support efforts that have been

attempted by parents of children with disabilities in the context of distance online learning in Indonesia, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Design**

This research was conducted using a qualitative case study approach. Case studies involve in-depth, intensive and sharply focused exploration of events (Wilig, 2008). This research uses an intrinsic case study because there is interest in this phenomenon and also aims to find out about the phenomenon specifically (Wilig, 2008).

### **2.2 Participant**

The participants in this research were 20 parents of children with special needs, consisting of 8 mothers of children with intellectual disabilities and 12 mothers of children with an autistic spectrum disorder. The participants live in Sidoarjo. The age of participants ranges from 33 to 51 years old, whereas their children are aged 6 to 15 years old. Regarding children's education, all of them currently attend formal schools starting from pre-school to grade 8 junior high school. In their daily lives, participants are the main companions of their children's learning process. Some participants carry out the learning assistance themselves, and some also involve the help of other people, such as spouses, family members, as well as household assistants, in addition to teachers and therapists.

### **2.3 Data Collection and Analysis**

The data collection methods used in this research were focused group discussion, observation and semi-structured interviews conducted online. The acquired data analysis uses thematic analysis. The data obtained was analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis aims to identify themes in the form of important or interesting patterns from the data, and utilize these themes to explore research topics or explain a particular issue (Boyatzis, 1998). Researchers followed six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which included: (1) Getting to know the data; (2) Generate initial code; (3) Looking for themes; (4) Examining themes; (5) Define and name the theme, and (6) Produce a report. This research uses thematic analysis with a bottom-up approach, which is also known as inductive thematic analysis. In this analysis, themes are analyzed and discovered from participant data, and not based on a predetermined theoretical framework.

## **3. Result**

The results of data analysis found 14 themes regarding the steps taken by parents in assisting children's learning, whether they have intellectual disabilities or autism. The 14 themes were then categorized into 3 groups of assistance based on their objectives, namely: (1) Assistance to increase children's understanding of learning material; (2) Assistance to help children to be cooperative in learning activities; and (3) Assistance to build positive interactions with children. All these themes are summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Parental Learning Assistance for Children with Disabilities

The Learning Assistancess	Types of Disabilities	
	Intellectual Disability	Autism
<b>A. Increase Children's Understanding of Learning Material</b>		
1. Adapt the way of explaining learning material to what teachers do at school	✓	✓
2. Make a study schedule taking into account the child's specific condition	✓	✓
3. Use various simple explanations to help children understand something	✓	✓
4. Provide explanations using methods and media that children like	✓	✓
5. Give examples to children about what is being taught	✓	✓
6. Provide repeated explanations		✓
<b>B. Help Children to Be Cooperative in Learning</b>		
1. Correct the incorrect behavior immediately	✓	
2. Help children to manage their emotions	✓	✓
3. Provide reinforcement so that children want to learn	✓	
4. Encourage children to be as independent as possible in learning activities	✓	✓
5. Inform children beforehand if there is a change in the learning routine (schedule, lesson materials, etc.)		✓
<b>C. Build Positive Interactions with Children</b>		
1. Provide motivation to encourage learning awareness	✓	✓
2. Maintain consistent interactions with children outside of study time, such as by accompanying children to play	✓	✓
3. Encourage siblings and other family members to also care and be willing to get involved in helping assist children with disabilities in their learning	✓	✓

There are 6 assistance efforts aimed at increasing children's understanding of learning material, 5 assistance efforts to help children to be cooperative in learning activities, and 3 assistance efforts to build positive interactions with children. The

following are several excerpts from interview transcripts with research participants, which represent data from each theme finding:

1. Adapt the way of explaining learning material to what teachers do at school

*...I once tried to explain the material my way, but it turned out my child didn't understand easily. Finally, I asked the teacher what is usually done at school to explain similar material. So, when I finally followed that method, it turned out to be true, my child understood it more easily... (Participant 3 - ID)*

*...since the beginning of learning from home, there have been many consultations with teachers about how to explain material or teach certain things to children ... (Participant 9 - ASD)*

2. Make a study schedule taking into account the child's specific condition

*...I set the study time at intervals, because my child can't focus for too long... (Participant 1 - ID)*

*...sometimes, even though the schedule has been set, I still pay attention to the child's mood... (Participant 11 - ASD)*

3. Use various simple explanations to help children understand something

*...can't explain too complicatedly, he will find it difficult to understand... (Participant 7 - ID)*

*...usually, I use as short and simple sentences as possible... (Participant 18 - ASD)*

4. Provide explanations using methods and media that children like

*...My child really likes animals. So, when teaching something, pay more attention if you use animal pictures or stories... (Participant 5 - ID)*

*...My child often studies while drawing. I used to worry that he didn't understand. I told him not to, but it got messy, he didn't cooperate. Finally, I let him, and it turns out he listened to what I said even though he was drawing... (Participant 14 - ASD)*

5. Give examples to children about what is being taught

*...I have to give lots of examples so he can understand quickly... (Participant 2 - ID)*

*...If I teach him to do something, then I have to do it too. If not, wah... his emotions will come out... (Participant 10 - ASD)*

6. Provide repeated explanations

*...Whatever the explanation, I have to be patient in repeating it with my child. If not, it will be difficult to understand... (Participant 17 - ASD)*

*...apart from that, it also has to be repeated to make sure he understands... (Participant 18 - ASD)*

7. Correct the incorrect behavior immediately

*...my child, if she makes a mistake, must immediately show her mistake and correct it. If not, for example if it takes a day to correct it, she won't immediately understand ... (Participant 8 - ID)*

*...any inappropriate behavior should be corrected immediately to help the child improve it... (Participant 5 - ID)*

8. Help children to manage their emotions

*...If my child is starting to get bored, I have to help her so that her emotions will not escalate further. I must immediately give her a break so that later she will want to study again. So I didn't force her to keep studying... (Participant 2 - ID)*

*...one thing that I also think is important to strive for when accompanying children to study, and I always do this is to keep their mood always good... (Participant 15 - ASD)*

9. Provide reinforcement so that children want to learn

*...I continue to give her reinforcement while studying ... (Participant 3 - ID)*

*...I give him enthusiasm so that he doesn't get bored easily when studying... (Participant 7 - ID)*

10. Encourage children to be as independent as possible in learning activities

*...I understand that in many ways my child still has many abilities. That's why I really try not to make him dependent on my help, including in studying. There is still time for him to try to do something himself... (Participant 4 - ID)*

*...sometimes I even pretend to ask her to help me, as well as to practice her ability to do something independently... (Participant 13 - ASD)*

11. Inform children beforehand if there is a change in the learning routine

*...with ASD children, we cannot suddenly change our routine. There must be information to them beforehand, so that they are ready, then they can cooperate and follow ... (Participant 12 - ASD)*

*...if something changes from the habit, I have to let her know beforehand... (Participant 15 - ASD)*

12. Provide motivation to encourage learning awareness

*...outside of study time, I also continue to motivate my child with stories, so that she slowly realizes that it's time to study ... (Participant 6 - ID)*

*...I also give him learning motivation while accompany him to play... (Participant 20 - ID)*

13. Maintain consistent interactions with children outside of study time

*...I try to also accompany my child in other activities, not only when studying ...*  
(Participant 1 - ID)

*...I try to consistently get used to positive interactions, because if the bond with my child is good, it will be easier for me to direct him, including when studying...*  
(Participant 19 - ASD)

14. Encourage siblings and other family members to also care and be willing to get involved in helping assist children with disabilities in their learning

*... I try to involve my other children to also love her, to care about their different siblings, to help their siblings learn well...* (Participant 8 - ID)

*...My principle is that one family must support each other. Everyone must care and help each other...* (Participant 16 - ASD)

Apart from that, it can also be seen in table 1 that not all parents who participated in this research showed all the findings of the mentoring steps. There are certain assistance efforts that only appear in parents of children with intellectual disabilities, and there are also other efforts that are only found in parents of children with autism spectrum disorder.

For parents who accompany children with autism, repeating various explanations is an important step to help children understand information or learning material. Repetition is also carried out using social stories as a typical communication medium for children with autism. Another step that is also specifically taken by parents in this group is to try to immediately inform them if there will be a change in their learning routine, from what is usually done every day, such as the order of learning materials, schedule, and so on. This is a preventive measure so as not to cause confusion in children, so that they remain adaptive in participating in learning activities.

Meanwhile, for parents who have children with intellectual disabilities, there are also two steps that are quite unique, namely efforts to quickly provide corrections to inappropriate learning behavior, as well as providing various reinforcements that can further encourage children to learn cooperatively. Similar to parents of children with autism, these two efforts are also carried out according to the child's specific characteristics.

#### **4. Discussion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant effects on children with disabilities in various aspects of their learning (Branstetter, 2020). The impact of the pandemic on children with disabilities can vary widely depending on the nature of the disability, available support systems, and the resources accessible to each child. Parents of children with disabilities need to adapt to the unique challenges presented by the pandemic to

ensure that their children receive the support and resources necessary for effective learning.

More specifically, there are several reasons why this adaptation is necessary. First, children with disabilities often have unique learning needs. Adapting to the pandemic involves recognizing and addressing these individualized needs to ensure that the child can access and benefit from educational resources. Second, adaptation is also necessary to ensure that children with disabilities can continue their education despite disruptions caused by the pandemic. This may involve finding alternative methods of learning that cater to the child's specific abilities and challenges. Third, children with disabilities may experience heightened stress or anxiety during times of change. Parents need to adapt by providing emotional support, understanding their child's emotions, and addressing any mental health concerns that may arise.

The data showed that 20 participants who were divided into two groups based on their child's types of disabilities (intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorders) had made a lot of efforts to assist children in learning during Covid-19 pandemic. Supporting several previous studies, the learning assistance found in the research not only helps children understand learning material, but also includes other learning support aspects. A number of efforts were made in mentoring groups to build cooperative learning attitudes in line with the research results of Coyne et al. (2020), Dunton et al. (2020), Bartlett et al. (2020) and Szabo et al. (2020). The efforts made to build positive interactions with children are also in line with research findings conducted by Bartlett et al. (2020), and Einspieler & Marschik (2020).

There are a number of efforts that apply the same, but there are also some that differ between parent groups. The differences in efforts that have been made are rooted in the differences in the child's conditions, which ideally require parents to implement learning strategies that accommodate children's weaknesses (Khan, 2010).

Parental understanding of the characteristics of disabilities possessed by their children is an important factor to ensure the success of the learning assistance; children with autism spectrum disorders are characterized by deficits in social interaction and communication as well as limited and repetitive behaviour, which leads to a preference for visual and concrete learning models to strengthen the abstract reasoning (Khan, 2010; Viscidi et al., 2013). This is in line with many efforts that have been made by the group of parents that have children with autism spectrum disorders, which includes providing speech stimulation, matching the explanations with those delivered at school, and using media that is preferred or suitable to the child's condition.

For children with intellectual disabilities with below average abilities in the areas of general cognition, memory, attention, adaptive strengths, motivation, motor skills, and language (Shree & Shukla, 2016), the emphasis on learning assistance will naturally be different from that of parents of children with autism. Weis et al. (2018) in their research stated that the appropriate learning strategy for children with intellectual disabilities is to



implement individualized instruction, prevent laziness through varying activities, and create diverse learning materials by taking into account variations in individual characteristics. Efforts to assist children's learning carried out by the group of parents of children with intellectual disabilities in this study are quite in line with the findings of Weis et al. (2018), such as immediately correcting wrong behavior, applying certain methods in teaching learning material to children, and providing motivation in the form of sentences to encourage learning.

Furthermore, the results of this research can be used as a basis for formulating strategies to empower parents of children with other disabilities, in optimizing their involvement in the child's learning process. Even though this research was conducted in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the findings are still relevant to providing optimal learning support for children with disabilities every day.

## 5. Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic and the various conditions that follow have added to the task of parents of children with disabilities to focus more on assisting their children's learning because the learning process is completely carried out from home. This research has explained what efforts have been made by parents of children with intellectual disabilities and children with autism spectrum disorders in assisting their children's learning, amidst various limitations.

The findings of this research show that there are 14 themes that represent the assistance steps that have been taken, which are then categorized into 3 groups according to the objectives of the learning assistance, namely: (1) Assistance to increase children's understanding of learning material; (2) Assistance to help children to be cooperative in learning activities; and (3) Assistance to build positive interactions with children. These results can be followed up by using them to provide guidance for parents of other children with disabilities who still face difficulties in accompanying their children's learning on a daily basis, even though we are not currently in a pandemic.

## 6. Bibliography

- Bartlett, J., Griffin, J., & Thompson, D. (2020). *Resources for supporting children's emotional well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Child TRENDS.  
<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>
- Boyatzis, R. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. SAGE Publication.
- Branstetter, R. (2020). *How parents can support children with special needs during distance learning*. Greater Good Magazine.  
[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_parents\\_can\\_support\\_children\\_with\\_special\\_needs\\_during\\_distance\\_learning](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_parents_can_support_children_with_special_needs_during_distance_learning)

- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp.77–101. DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a](https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a).
- Coyne, L., Gould, E., & Grimaldi, M. (2020). First things first: Parent psychological flexibility and self-compassion during COVID-19. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 14(4), 1–7.
- Dunton, G., Do, B., & Wang, S. (2020). Early effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical activity and sedentary behavior in children living in the U.S. *BMC Public Health*, 20(1351), 1–13.
- Einspieler, C., & Marschik, P. (2020). The developmental spectrum of prenatal Zika virus exposure. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 4(5), 345–346.
- Ferara, M., & Ferara, P. (2005). Parents as partners: Raising awareness as a teacher preparation program. *The Clearing House*, 79(2), 77–82.
- Greenwood, D., & Levin, M. (2007). *Introduction to action research: Social research for social change: Vol. 2th ed.* SAGE Publication.
- Hendriani, W., Nur, H., & Daulay, N. (2020). *Dinamika keterlibatan orangtua dalam pendampingan belajar anak di masa pandemi Covid-19 (Laporan Penelitian)*. Ikatan Psikologi Perkembangan Indonesia.
- Kakroo, W. (2021). Parenting children with disabilities during Covid-19 pandemic. Kashmir Observer. <https://kashmirobsver.net/2021/05/21/parenting-children-with-disabilities-during-covid-19-pandemic/>
- Khan, T. (2010). The effects of multimedia learning on children with different special education needs. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 4341–4345.
- Limbers, C., McCollum, C., & Greenwood, E. (2020). Physical activity moderates the association between parenting stress and quality of life in working mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Ment Health Phys Act.*, 19, 100358.
- Motherly. (2020). Motherly's third annual state of motherhood survey results. Mother. <https://www.mother.ly/news/state-of-motherhood-survey>
- Pajarningsih. (2003). Positive deviance. *Bulletin Positive Deviance*, Vol. 1(1).
- Park, H., Byun, S., & Kim, K. (2011). Parental involvement and students' cognitive outcomes in Korea: Focusing on private tutoring. *Sociology of Education*, 84(1), 3–22.
- Purwanta, E., Hermanto, Sukinah, & Harahap, F. (2016). Analisis kebutuhan untuk berwirausaha pada siswa berkebutuhan khusus. *Cakrawala Pendidikan*, 35(3), 339–348.

- Purwanto, A., Pramono, R., & Asbari, M. (2020). Studi eksploratif dampak pandemi COVID-19 terhadap proses pembelajaran online di sekolah dasar. *Journal of Education, Psychology, and Counseling*, 2(1), 1–12.
- Rudiyati, S. (2013). Peningkatan kompetensi guru sekolah inklusif dalam penanganan anak berkebutuhan pendidikan khusus melalui pembelajaran kolaboratif. *Cakrawala Pendidikan*, 32(2), 296–306.
- Sari, Diana, P., & Stephani. (2021). Pengalaman orang tua anak berkebutuhan khusus mengenai pembelajaran daring selama pandemi covid-19. *Jurnal Pendidikan Khusus*, 17(1), 11–19.
- Setyaningsih, L. (2020). Penjelasan psikolog soal tantangan sekolah di rumah bagi balita dan orangtua. *Tribunnews*.  
<https://wartakota.tribunnews.com/2020/08/14/penjelasan-psikolog-soal-tantangan-sekolah-di-rumah-bagi-balita-dan-orangtua>
- Shree, A., & Shukla, P. (2016). Intellectual disability: Definition, classification, causes and characteristics. *Learning Community*, 7(1), 9–20.
- Susilowati, E., & Azzasyofia, M. (2020). The parents stress level in facing children study from home in the early of covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. *International Journal of Science and Society*, 2(3), 1–12.
- Szabo, T., Richling, S., Embry, D., Biglan, A., & Wilson, K. (2020). From helpless to hero: Promoting values-based behavior and positive family interaction in the midst of COVID-19. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 13(1), 568–576.
- Viscidi, E., Triche, E., & Pescosolido, M. (2013). Clinical characteristics of children with autism spectrum disorder and co-occurring epilepsy. *PLOS ONE*, 8(7), 1–11.
- Wilig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology (2nd ed.)*. McGraw-Hill.
- Weiss, S., Markowitz, R., & Kiel, E. (2018). How to teach students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities in inclusive and special education settings: Teachers' perspectives on skills, knowledge and attitudes. *European Educational Research Journal*, 17(6), 837–856.
- Wortham, S. (2013). *Early childhood curriculum: Developmental bases for learning and teaching*. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Yoder, G. (2021). *Experiences of caregivers of middle school children with autism spectrum disorder in middle school [Dissertation]*. Ball State University.
- Yulianingsih, W., Suhanadji, S., Nugroho, R., & Mustakim, M. (2020). Keterlibatan orangtua dalam pendampingan belajar anak selama masa pandemi covid-19. *Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 5(2), 1138–1150.