Behavior observation of an autistic student:
a case study at KLIA Complex Secondary School, Nilai

Norazila Suboh

Academic and Life-long Learning Department, Hulu Langat Community College,
Jalan Prima Saujana 2/G, Taman Prima Saujana,
43000 Kajang, Selangor.

E-mail: norazilasuboh@gmail.com

ABSTRACT – Autism is a category of disability characterized by disruptions in problems such as social relationships, communication, emotions, less imagination and play abilities. This study examined an autistic student with repetitive behavior who likes to mimic a cartoon character, and how a behavior management program such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) could help the student. Three initial observations were made to obtain baseline data before the intervention program was implemented. The observation was carried out through basic ABA: Baseline-Treatment-Baseline. The design, results and details of these observations are presented in this report.

1. INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disability, typically appearing during childhood and affecting a person's ability to communicate and interact with others. Autism typically appears during the first three years of life due to a neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain. It is four more times prevalent in boys than girls. Autism shows no racial, ethnic or social boundaries, and cuts across family income, lifestyle and educational levels. Autism and its associated behaviors have been estimated to occur in as many as 1 in 68 newborns. Autism is a disorder that has a severe impact on someone like self-segregation, self-harming behavior, cognitive problems, sensory deprivation, severe affective exclusion, self-stimulation, sudden anger, echolalia speech problems and communication problem [1-2].

Communication among themselves is stunted and they cannot connect directly. They also have behavioral problems but sometimes have broad intellectual advantage. Often they exhibit advantages in mathematics or mechanical skills or in music, memory, and others. According to [2-3], autism is an imperfection in brain development and shows the characteristics of children who appear to be alienated, lonely and immersed in their own world. Autism interferes with the inner part of the brain that controls emotional and communication comprehension directly or indirectly, social and interpersonal ability.

Various early intervention programs exist to help autistic children such as *ABA*, *Lovaas Program*, *Incidental Teaching* and *Positive Behavior Support* that

has led to 'recovery' or to a reduction in symptoms [4]. ABA is an approach to understanding and changing behavior. It is not a specific therapy itself, but a range of different strategies and techniques that can be used to teach people with ASD, new skills and reduce their difficult behavior. ABA can help children with autism spectrum disorder by improving their social, communication, academic and life skills and reducing difficult behavior. ABA approach and its techniques can be used to help autistic children to improve their social skills, self-care skills, communication skills, play skills and ability to manage their own behavior. It can also help reduce difficult behavior like inattention, aggression and screaming. To overcome or minimize the behavior of these autistic pupils, when in class or at home, all involved individuals need to know the correct and effective way to manage the behavior of their child or pupil. This can be achieved by making an early observation using ABA method. In this study, ABA method was chosen and implemented.

2. METHODOLOGY

ABA's approach to the behavior of the autism student, either inside the home or in the classroom, identifying the negative or changing behavior, and recording the observations made periodically, before and after intervention or behavior modification is done. This method focuses on a positive reinforcement strategy [5]. It will help the individual in dealing with learning problems and can improve the skills in an individual. In this study, an observation has been made to formulate a behavior management program for a 13-year-old "low-functional" autistic student who has been identified through a teacher's recommendation in charge of special education at the KLIA Complex Secondary School located at Nilai, Selangor in Malaysia. Three initial observations were made to obtain baseline data before the intervention program was implemented. This observation is carried out with the basic design of ABA: Baseline-Treatment-Baseline. This design is appropriate to see the behavioral changes that may occur to an individual who undergoes the program.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This observation study was conducted on a respondent, a student of autism. Targeted behavior or

what observation and intervention would be is repetitive behavior of '*imitating Bugs Bunny's conversation style*.' This repetitive behavior is also known as *echolalia*, where the person repeats noises and phrases that they hear [7]. This observation was conducted for four days on April 20, 2016, April 27, 2016, May 4, 2016 and May 11, 2016 and has been conducted on 10 different periods, with each observation last for 30 minutes. In order to obtain the desired data, observer have agreed to observe respondent during the teaching and learning sessions. Observation has been made three times for Baseline Data Before Intervention (Table 1), four times for Data During Intervention (Table 2) and three times for Baseline Data After Intervention (Table 3). Intervention used in this study is using wooden blocks that the respondent need to arrange accordingly.

Table 1 Baseline Data (Before Intervention).

Date & Time of Obervation	Frequency of Behavior								Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
20/4/2016 8:30- 9:00 am	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		7
20/4/2016 10:00-10:30 am	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	8
20/4/2016 12:00- 12:30 pm	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	8

Table 2 Intervention Data (Treatment).

Date & Time of Obervation	Frequency of Behavior								Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
27/4/2016 09:00-09:30 am	√	√	√	√	√	√			6
27/4/2016 10:30-11:00 am	√	√	√	√	√				5
4/5/2016 10:00-10:30 am	√	√	√	√					4
4/5/2016 11:00-11:30 am	√	√	√	√					4

Table 3 Baseline Data (After Intervention).

Date & Time of Obervation	Frequency of Behavior								Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
11/5/2016 8:30- 9:00am	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		4
11/5/2016 10:00-10:30am	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	3
11/5/2016 12:00-12:30 pm	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	3

As shown in Figure 1, it can be clearly seen that the behavior of respondent '*imitating Bugs Bunny's conversation style* ' had shown significant changes and decreased during and after intervention was done. The baseline data before intervention shown high frequencies of repetitive behavior, occurring especially when the respondent were left unattended by the teacher, causing the respondent to scream and talk loudly. After intervention were introduced, the frequencies become lesser over time. This shown the intervention used was a success.
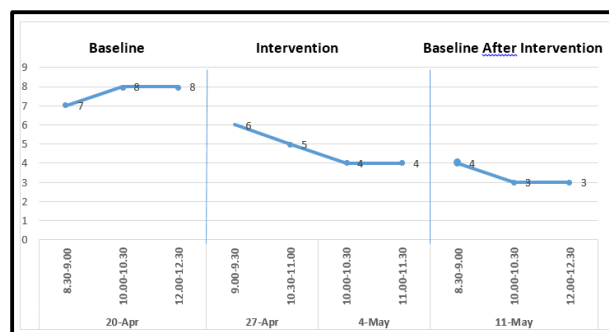

Figure 1 Overall Frequencies of Behavior of 'imitating Bugs Bunny's conversation style.'

4. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, individuals with autism are very unique individuals and prefer to be in their own world. From observation using the ABA method in this study, it is clear that individuals with autism can be helped to keep them focus on the real world, and away from their own imaginary world through appropriate interventions. For example, through the arrangement of wooden blocks, the intervention used in this study. These interventions make it easier for individuals who have autism to concentrate on activities that are far more effective and stimulating to their minds.

Through the observations, the repetitive behavior of the respondent is very disturbing to other individuals. They were shocked when the respondent suddenly screamed and talk imitating Bugs Bunny's voice and repeating it over and over loudly. Interview with the teacher in charged revealed that the respondent screamed during school assembly while the teacher was giving a speech. That is why interventions need to be given to respondents to reduce the target behavior which can distract the people around them.

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