

Article

The Meaning of Learning For Students With Special Needs (Phenomenological Study at Lsba Jakarta - Indonesia)

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Abstract: Education is the right of every person to improve the quality of themselves through a comfortable atmosphere and environment. For students with special needs, this greatly influences progress both in terms of skills and how learning is interpreted. London School Beyond Academy (LSBA) is a skills education institution that has succeeded in forming special needs students to be able to enjoy the teaching and learning process through a conducive environment and understand them well. The purpose of this research is to find out the meaning of learning for special needs students who attend LSBA. Through Alfred Schutz's thinking, this study found that the intersubjective or everyday world is an element that plays a role in the thinking of special needs students in understanding meaning. This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological study by selecting four special needs students, three lecturers and one parent. There are five themes that come up in this research for the meaning of learning for special needs students. The themes are increasing knowledge and becoming smarter, making more friends, having fun, achievement and learning because of parents. The supporting factors for learning for students with special needs are parents as the main ones, then siblings, the school environment, extended family, people closest to them other than family and friends. The self-concept of students with special needs examined in this research shows a positive self-concept. This research provides benefits for schools, parents and all other related parties in understanding students with special needs in learning.

Keywords: Education; special needs; students; meaning of learning; self concept

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right, where every individual has the opportunity to develop their potential optimally. However, in reality, education is often faced with complex challenges, especially for students who have special needs. These students may face various obstacles in their learning process, both obstacles related to their physical, mental and emotional aspects. Of course, this is not easy for the students themselves and their families or companions. Previous research described in the research background by (Nazir et al., 2024) also shows how most special needs children experience difficulties in their learning process.

The meaning of learning for students with special needs is certainly different from that of regular students in general. Sometimes students with special needs face many obstacles. The closest environment that really influences students is parents and extended family. It is not uncommon for many parents and families to not accept the existence of children with special needs. For this reason, awareness and understanding of parents and families is very important for the learning process of students with special needs. This was also

expressed in the writings of the following previous researchers (Mu'awwanah & Supena, 2021), (Asfari, 2022) and (Lestari et al., 2023). Apart from that, the surrounding environment also influences students with special needs in learning. The school environment is also a big influence.

This is confirmed by research conducted by (Izzah et al., 2023), (Lestari et al., 2023) and (Lazar, 2020). The acceptance of friends and the surrounding environment towards students with special needs is extraordinary support for them. Because it is not uncommon for the surrounding environment to reject them, even ridicule or bully them, research conducted by (Waluyati et al., 2022) and (Berchiatti et al., 2021). One educational institution that focuses on education for students with special needs is London School Beyond Academy (LSBA). Developed as a skills and training institute that provides students with special needs to learn in a fun, interactive and creative atmosphere. Currently LSBA is available on 2 campuses, namely LSPR Jakarta and Bekasi, Indonesia. There are 4 majors offered at LSBA, namely Office Administration, Catering, Crafts and Digital Image & Print (www.lspr.ac.id, n.d). Learning process in LSBA includes a student support system that can create a convenient atmosphere. Mention in previous research collegial support appears to be a positive factor and boosts the morale of the educators of inclusive classes (Thabo Makhalemele & LDN Tlale, 2020)

Previous studies have shown that students with special needs experience unique challenges in their learning process. The parties who are close to the lives of children with special needs are very important in their learning process. Several studies use a phenomenological approach to explore these students' learning experiences, and the findings highlight the importance of understanding individual context and social interactions in supporting students' academic and social development (Gama et al., 2023), (Ayuningtyas et al., 2022) and (Iswati & Rohaningsih, 2021). The application of self-concept according to Roger for students with special needs is also applied in this research. How students with special needs conceptualize themselves in their learning process is an interesting thing to elaborate in this research.

This research was conducted to understand the learning process experienced by students with special needs. What is the meaning of students with special needs regarding the learning they undergo? Also to find out the parties who play a role in the learning process of students with special needs. With research that focuses on the meaning of learning for students with special needs, researchers can produce valuable insights to support the development of an educational environment that is more inclusive, responsive and student-oriented, especially for students with special needs. This study not only provides a theoretical contribution to the understanding of the meaning of learning for individuals with special needs, but also has a significant practical impact in efforts to improve the quality of education for all, especially students with special needs.

Literature Review

1. Phenomenology

Alfred Schutz is one of many intellectuals in the field of social sciences who has a Jewish background (Embree in Supraja & Al Akbar, 2021). Alfred Schutz said that every individual exists in a stream of consciousness that arises from the process of reflecting on everyday experiences. Assuming that there is another person's reality which is understood through their thoughts and feelings, this reflection is then transmitted to other people through social interaction. For Schutz, phenomenology is an approach used as a tool to observe and evaluate an individual's inner life, which involves the experience of phenomena or appearances as they are experienced, known as the flow of consciousness (Campbel, 1994, as cited in Rasid et al., 2021).

The meaning process begins with the sensing process, which is a continuous experience. Initially, sensory experiences have no clear meaning. New meaning emerges when the experience is connected to previous experiences and through interactions with other people. Each individual brings their awareness to life through reflection on daily experiences. Assuming there is an understanding of other people conveyed through one's own way of thinking and feeling, this reflection is then expanded by social interactions with other people (Campbell, 1994, as cited in Wita & Mursal, 2022).

2. Self-Concept

Self-concept is an individual's perception of himself. In this context, the role of self-concept is very significant in shaping a person's personality and behavior. Individuals' responses to situations are based on their perception of themselves and the world around them. They react to reality as they perceive it, according to their self-image. Self-concept is a very determining factor in an individual's response to their environment. This means that self-concept is a key factor in determining how a person interprets the meaning of their relationship with their environment (Zulkarnain & Asmara, 2020).

According to (Rogers, 1951, as cited in Zakaria & Tahar, 2017) states that self-concept includes beliefs, feelings, perceptions, attitudes and values that are upheld by an individual. Self-concept also means thinking about oneself, and other people's views of the individual. Self-concept is divided into two types: positive and negative self-concept. Individuals who have a negative self-concept are those who are not enthusiastic, easily irritated, and are often associated with failure. Meanwhile, individuals who have a positive self-concept are those who are always happy, not easily shaken, optimistic and often associated with success. Furthermore, according to Zakaria & Tahar (2017), teachers must care about the development of students' self-concept at school so that a positive self-concept can be formed.

The analytical review presented by (Stevens et al., 2017, as cited in Khusheim (2022)), states that research conducted by researchers over the last three decades regarding self-concept shows disparities in self-concept between students with special needs and their peers both academically and globally. This study concludes that negative self-concept is certainly detrimental and affects the overall self-assessment of the achievement of students with special needs. In addition, there is a significant relationship between self-concept and social integration as well as students' academic performance. Most researchers suggest a bidirectional relationship, where positive self-concept is strongly related to achievement orientation and future demands. Findings further suggest that strong supports, including both mental and physical health, can play an important role in shaping positive self-concept among students with special needs.

3. Special Need Students

Children with special needs refer to children who face obstacles or differences in the process of growth and development, whether physically, mentally, intellectually, socially-emotionally, or in terms of communication that are not the same as children in general or those considered normal. This condition causes them to need specific educational services. A condition is classified as a special need if the impairment is significant or permanent, requiring tailored assistance or services. (Sulthon, 2020, as cited in Wahyuni et al., 2021).

Children with special needs, refer to children who require special education and services so that they can reach their full potential as humans. The term "extraordinary" is a label in the educational context for individuals who have deficiencies or experience various types of disorders that are not common, different from normal people in general. The characteristics of children with special needs include several conditions, such as children who have visual impairments (blind), hearing impairments (deaf impaired), intellectual impairments (mental retardation), impaired body movement (impaired), behavioral and emotional disorders (impaired), have high intelligence and special talents (gifted and talented), as well as experiencing autism (Halidu, 2022).

Methodology

The phenomenological approach emerged in this research as a relevant conceptual framework for exploring the meaning of learning from the subjective perspective of students with special needs. Phenomenology offers an approach that emphasizes a deep understanding of individual experiences and understanding individual intentions and motivations (Farid, 2018). By using this qualitative approach, researchers can better explore the learning world of students with special needs. As well as revealing meanings, challenges and aspirations that may be hidden behind their experiences.

This research was conducted through in-depth interviews with students who have special needs that chosen purposively. Participant selection was applied to students with special needs who understood the concept of learning and could be invited to communicate. It was quite difficult to find the special needs students who can communicate well. But finally in this research, four students were interviewed, namely K,

D, R and A. And to make data more valid and reliable, researchers include 1 parent and 3 lecturers who assist students with special needs in learning. The following is a table of informants in this research.

Table 1. Characteristics of informants in this study

No	Initial	Gender	Age (years old)	Major	Role	Method to Collect the Data
1	K	Male	19			
2	D	Male	19	Digital Image & Printing Techniques		
3	A	Female	21		Students	In Depth Interview
4	R	Male	22	Office Administration		
5	S	Female	50	N/A	Parent	
6	Sk	Male	37	N/A		
7	I	Male	29	N/A	Lecturers	Focus Group Discussion
8	N	Female	29	N/A		(FGD)

Source : Researcher (2024)

Direct observations were also carried out in the LSBA learning environment during the research period. Observations were carried out at school and also in the classroom when the teaching and learning process was taking place, also during breaks between lessons. Data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Hubberman technique (Sugiyono, 2021), namely data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions. Data reduction is carried out by considering students' subjective experiences in the context of their learning. Thematic analysis is used to identify patterns and themes that emerge from the data obtained and presented in the data presentation. Data validation is carried out by comparing findings from all sources as well as interview notes, FGDs and field observations so that it is expected to provide comprehensive results. And finally, conclusions are drawn from the research conducted.

Results

Below are summarized research results related to the meaning of learning for students with special needs and the support of various parties in the learning process as well as the self-concept of students with special needs.

1. The Meaning of Learning

The meaning-making process for students with special needs is a continuous sensory process and this meaning is influenced by interactions with the people around them. The meaning of learning based on this research is what emerges from the words of several students and is added to the statements of parents and lecturers. It is quite difficult to explore the meaning of learning from students with special needs, so students who understand the concept of learning are selected. Apart from that, those who are mentally and emotionally stable and can communicate well are also selected. For this reason, students whose spectrum of special needs is small are selected. It is difficult to research students who are on a large spectrum of disorders or even who have difficulty communicating. The following is the meaning of learning that emerged in this research as well as supporting factors in the learning of LSBA students.

2. Increase Knowledge and Become Smarter

Most of the students who became informants stated that the meaning of learning for them was to increase their knowledge and make them smart. This was added by the informant, R "So that our brain will fill up and become smarter," he said. R is a male student who is diligent in class and understands learning concepts more easily than his classmates. At first glance, R is the same as other friends and does not appear to have special needs. So for R it is quite easy to understand and interpret the concept of learning. And also in living it in his daily learning at LSBA.

A, who is a female student, added that studying also sharpens the brain in learning soft skills and hard skills. R, who is a student majoring in Office Administration, stated that he liked both practical activities such as social skills and soft skills lessons as well as practical activities such as designing posters and printing techniques. For him, both are important and must be studied to increase knowledge. A is a diligent female student and achieves, and she is always enthusiastic about studying at LSBA. Apart from that, K also added that learning also means education, which means increasing his knowledge.

Mrs S, one of the students' parents stated that for her daughter, learning is receiving lessons and increasing knowledge. According to parents, this is very useful for their children's future lives. The curriculum taught at LSBA is very practical and supports children's independence, so as parents of children with special needs, of course we, as parents, really want our children to be as independent as others. "Lessons such as screen printing equip students to be able to make screen prints and other techniques, sewing, painting, cake making, laundry, these are of course very useful" she continued.

Informant I, who is a Lecturer and Head of the Job Training Center (Balai Latihan Kerja), confirmed Mrs. S's statement, that at LSBA, practical skills are honed which are supported by theory so that students can live independently. According to him, the students who work at BLK are the ones who are prepared to be ready to enter the world of work. Whether it's working in a work environment or building your own business. For this reason, apart from hard skills, these students are also equipped with soft skills such as how to adapt to the work environment, control their emotions and behavior in the job world. Apart from that, it is also equipped with soft skills for selling live streams, because currently digital power in selling is very important. And these children must also be able to adapt to changing times, continued I.

3. Add friend

One informant (D) said that studying also means making more friends. "By attending lectures somewhere, we will make new friends so that our social circle becomes wider," he said. This was also confirmed by another student informant, R said that apart from already knowing friends from the same high school, here you can add more friends.

4. Pleasant

All student informants agreed that studying at LSBA was fun for them. This was also reinforced by Lecturer N, sometimes some students couldn't wait to get back to school if the lecture break was too long. They want to get in immediately, because studying at LSBA is fun for them. Meeting their peers and sharing stories is something they look forward to, according to D, a student informant.

5. Achievements

Some students with special needs interpret learning as being an achievement. This was conveyed by Lecturer N, which was also confirmed by lecturers Sk and I. For some students, in studying they have to achieve the best score, for example 100 out of 100. Then they feel satisfied and consider that "This is learning". Some students, according to informant N, if they have not reached a score of 100, they will improve it so that they reach the score of 100, then they will be satisfied and go home happy. There are even students who feel anxious if they can't. This is the role of lecturers and teaching assistants in giving them confidence in the learning process. Some have to receive verbal recognition from their lecturers or teaching assistants, for example being given the comment "you are great". If they don't get that praise, they think they haven't learned on that day. It's unique, but that's what happens to students with special needs according to the lecturers who were the informants in this research.

For informant A, he also interpreted learning as achievement. Because according to him there is a sense of satisfaction if he can achieve what he should. And for himself he will try to achieve the best grades and what he should do in practical lessons. For practical lessons, according to him, why do we have to achieve the best, because the knowledge taught at LSBA will support his future. So that you can become an independent one.

6. Learn Because of Parents

According to lecturers who participated in this research, quite a lot of students with special needs study because their parents told them to. For example, this can be seen in students who seem forced to go to campus and make do with their studies. However, according to them, there were also those who were told to do so by their parents, but the students did it well. Some of the motives are because they realize that their parents' instructions are good in their opinion. Or there are those who are forced to, usually this happens to students with special needs who are low on the spectrum/high special needs symptoms. Student informant, D, said that he studied because his parents told him to and D himself obeyed his parents and underwent the learning process well. And has a great desire to make his parents happy.

Discussion

The five themes that emerged above in this research can be described in the following model in figure 1.

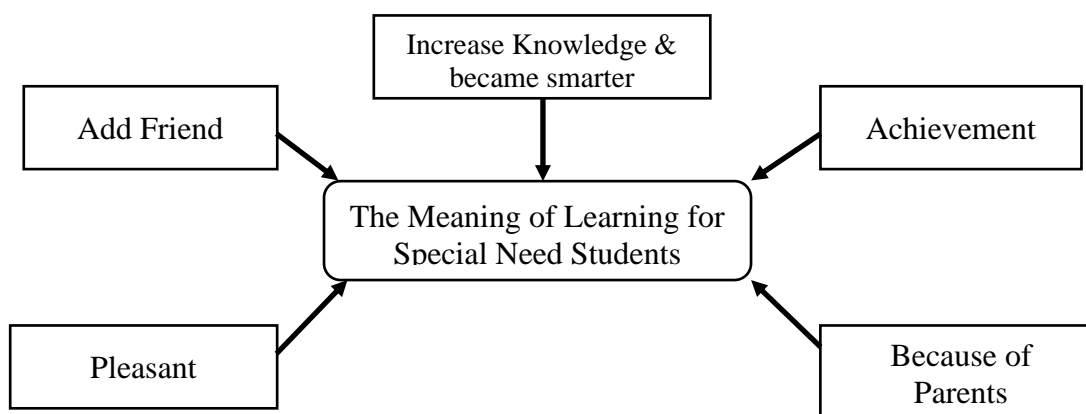


Figure 1. The meaning of learning for students with special needs
Source: Researcher (2024)

1. Support from Various Parties in The Learning Process

For students with special needs, the presence of people around them who support them in learning is very necessary. Moreover, the presence of those closest to you, especially parents and other family members. The following is described one by one based on the results of the research conducted.

Parents

Parents are at the top of the list in providing learning support for students with special needs. All student sources stated that parents were at the top of the list who provided their support in learning. This was also confirmed by the lecturer in this study, that supportive parents will usually make students confident and happy to undergo their learning process when studying at LSBA. Lecturer Sk added that parental influence is very important, shaping the color of students with special needs. Parents can shape and support students with special needs to achieve learning targets. If a student is stiff, it's probably the parents who taught him that. However, if a student is flexible and enthusiastic, it could be the influence of his parents too. According to Sk, this can be seen in the example of one of the LSBA students who was very good at theory. It turned out that at home, his mother, who was a lecturer, taught him this theory, so the student was good at theory. But there are also other students who are good in practice. According to Sk, the role of parents is also needed here to ensure continuity with the learning provided by lecturers and assistant lecturers at LSBA.

Siblings

The second influential party is siblings, where younger siblings or older siblings are very influential on students with special needs. There are several cases that make learning not conducive according to Sk Lecturers. Sometimes there are students who are not supported by their younger siblings or older siblings. Little brothers and sisters of students with special needs must be made aware that their siblings are not the same as their normal selves. The role of parents here is very important in providing understanding to their siblings. So sibling treatment cannot be the same as normal siblings. Siblings have to understand and accept their sibling's shortcomings.

However, there are also many siblings who play a role and help their siblings with special needs. Information from Lecturer I, there is one LSBA student whose older brother is very attentive to his younger sibling who has special needs. So, for example, if there is homework, his older brother will help him complete the homework. And his behavior also seems to be protecting his younger brother. Sometimes when children with special needs are young adults, like the sources in this study, they are also as demanding as their normal siblings. The story of one of the students at LSBA, according to informant Sk, was that the student demanded that his parents also be allowed to take a car to campus like his older brother, who was given permission by his parents. This of course requires the role of parents and collaboration with siblings to provide understanding to students with special needs, so that students with special needs can accept and not demand the same things as their normal siblings.

School

Schools, as a second home, are no less important in supporting the learning of students with special needs. Students with special needs who are sent to special needs schools will of course experience different treatment from special needs students who are sent to regular schools even though the school is an inclusive school. Special needs schools usually have teachers who are experienced in educating students with special needs. Also a supportive school environment starting from school guards, receptionists, lecturers and teaching assistants. School support is very necessary in supporting students's learning processes, especially their teachers. This is also in accordance with research conducted by (Zakaria & Tahar, 2017) that teachers must care about the development of students' self-concept at school so that a positive self-concept can be formed. Also research conducted by (Israel, 2023) regarding the importance of the role of teachers and school management for the progress of students.

Big Family

The role of the extended family is also very important in the learning process of students with special needs. People in the extended family such as grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts must also be able to embrace and support students with special needs so that their learning process can go well. It is not uncommon for students with special needs to also live with grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts in the same house. And this is very important as someone who is close to students with special needs. Students with special needs are usually imitative, they will imitate people close to them. For example, according to Lecturer N, there is one LSBA student whose hobbies and preferences are imitating his grandmother. Because his grandmother lives at home and his parents are rarely at home because they work full time. His closeness to his grandmother made him like drinking tea and his favorite songs were songs that his grandmother often played at her house. Also, the student's behavior of frequently washing his hands by his grandmother was also imitated by the student. Here we can conclude that people at home have a very important role in the lives of students with special needs, including in the learning process.

Other Closed People Besides Family

The role of those closest to you is also very important in the learning process of students with special needs. Most students with special needs also imitate people who are not their family but are closely involved in their daily lives, such as the family's maid and driver. N revealed that there was a student who was close to his assistant because his parents were very busy and rarely at home. So this child is close to his housekeeper. This

assistant also accompanied him when he was at school until now studying at LSBA. There are other students who are close to the driver, and tend to imitate the driver's behavior, such as behavior in worshipping the Islamic religion. Here we can see that frequent interactions with people outside the family but close to them in daily life also affect students with special needs.

Friends

Playmates both at school and at home also influence the lives of students with special needs. Special needs students who are well received in the school and home environment will make them a good person. However, it is not uncommon for there to be rejection among his friends. In fact, if this special needs student is rejected, this student will show strange behavior, said informant Sk. So it would be best for everyone who is closely involved in the lives of students with special needs to work together and sustainably so that these people can become successful people in their lives and can also go through their learning process well. Below is a model that summarizes the support of various parties in the learning process of students with special needs.

An explanation of support from various parties in the learning process can be depicted in the following picture (figure 2).

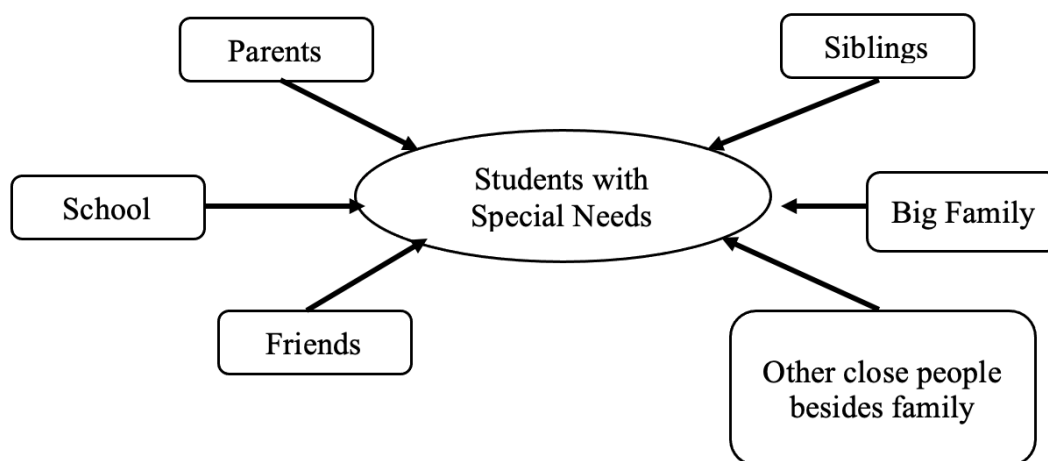


Figure 2. Support from parties in the learning process of students with special needs
 Source : Researcher (2024)

There are three main concepts in phenomenology, namely experience, meaning and consciousness. According to Alfred Schutz in Supraja & Al Akbar (2021), humans as social creatures are aware of their lives as a social consciousness. In phenomenology, humans are active agents in constructing the social world (Sofian, 2014). Students with special needs are also active agents who live their lives in the learning process. They consciously live it and construct the reality that they are the same as other normal students and live their lives at their place of study in this research at an educational institution for students with special needs, namely at LSBA.

Alfred Schutz makes the assumption that there is another person's reality which is understood through one's thoughts and feelings. These reflections are then transmitted to other people through social interactions (Supraja & Al Akbar, 2021). For this reason, the role of the people around students with special needs is very important, which according to Sk sources will color the lives of students with special needs. In this research, the parties who play the most important role are parents (father and mother) who really color the lives of students with special needs. Then, within the family, the role of siblings is also very influential, whether there is acceptance or rejection from siblings towards students with special needs. Also extended family, in this case grandparents, uncles and aunts as well as cousins. The presence of other people at home who help the family every day also greatly influences the lives of students with special needs. From the lecturer sources studied in this research, it was stated that the role of household assistants who help in the daily lives of students with

special needs and also drivers in some cases turns out to be a big role, because they accompany these students with special needs.

2. Special Needs Student's Self Concept

Self-concept plays a big role in a person's behavior and personality, including students with special needs. A good self-concept will support how students act and explain their learning process, so that they can interpret the learning process they are undergoing. In this research, there are students with special needs who attend LSBA. From the research conducted, it can be seen that the four student speakers have a positive self-concept according to Roger. Where the four informant students experienced their learning at LSBA well, it was fun and they had goals they wanted to achieve. Interviewee A said that he had to improve his soft skills and hard skills because they were important for his life. Also informant D said that studying at LSBA was fun and he liked it. Also a statement that he must study to become smart and make his parents happy. This is a reflection of the positive self-concept of a student with special needs. The statement expressed by K also reflects a positive self-concept where K can get education and enjoy studying at LSBA. Interviewee R also stated that he enjoyed studying at LSBA and made many friends on the LSBA campus.

Informant Mrs. S, as a parent of a student with special needs, stated that her daughter always enjoyed increasing her skills and always enjoyed going to campus and was rarely absent unless she was sick. This describes her daughter as a special needs student who also has a positive self-concept and is always enthusiastic. According to the lecturers in this research, the majority of students that study at LSBA are people who have a positive self-concept, including the four students in this research. The lecturer further stated that there were only a few students who had negative self-concepts which then influenced them in learning. Where these students become unenthusiastic, sometimes feel inferior and easily offended and even frustrated if they cannot do things they should be able to do in their learning. Sometimes they also have tantrums. For students who have a negative self-concept, the LSBA team will usually work in a team continuously so that the student's self-concept becomes positive and of course they will be enthusiastic about learning. Collaboration between the LSBA campus and parents at home is also very important in this case, according to informants Sk and I, so that students are handled well and develop in a positive direction.

Conclusion

Research related to the meaning of learning for students with special needs is interesting to research and study further. The results of this study provide deep insight into how students with special needs understand and experience their learning process, as well as the factors supporting the learning of students with special needs. There are five themes that emerged in this research obtained from sources, namely LSBA students, parents and lecturers. The five themes are increasing knowledge and becoming smarter, making more friends, having fun, achievement and learning because of parents. Meanwhile, the supporting factors for learning for students with special needs are parents as the main ones, then siblings, the school environment, extended family, people closest to them other than family and friends.

The self-concept of students with special needs examined in this research shows a positive self-concept, where the students are enthusiastic about learning and realize that the education they are undergoing will be useful for their later lives. The importance of collaboration between parents, school families and the surrounding environment really supports students with special needs in learning and interpreting learning for themselves. With good and supportive treatment and an inclusive environment, students with special needs will grow well and be independent, and have a positive self-concept just like other peers of the same age and can be of benefit to society. This research is expected to be useful for practitioners involved in education for students with special needs, parents and other related parties, so that they can help understand the learning process of students with special needs well.

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