

Contextual Learning Management and Independence in Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract:

This study examines the management of contextual learning to enhance the independence of students with intellectual disabilities at SLB Nike Ardila and SLB Bina Kasih Bandung. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and G.R. Terry's management framework, data were analysed through the functions of planning, organising, implementing, and supervising. The findings show that both schools developed Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) focusing on personal, social, and basic vocational skills. Students were grouped according to their abilities, while teachers, assistants, therapists, and parents shared responsibility for the learning process. Contextual learning was implemented systematically through demonstrations, visual communication, repeated practice, and daily-life activities, with continuous supervision to monitor progress. Key challenges included limited teacher understanding, resources, facilities, behavioural and communication difficulties, and insufficient parental support. These challenges were addressed through individualized instruction, supportive learning environments, family collaboration, technology, and therapeutic assistance. The study concludes that well-managed contextual learning supports students' cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and independent-living skills.

Keywords: contextual; independence; intellectual barriers; learning process.

INTRODUCTION

Children with intellectual disabilities are a group of students who face complex challenges related to developing independence. In general, they experience obstacles in self-care processes such as bathing, dressing, eating, and maintaining personal hygiene, indicating significant limitations in the adaptive domain (Schalock et al., 2019). These limitations are not only physical or motoric but also encompass socio-emotional aspects, such as the ability to establish interpersonal relationships, understand social norms, and communicate needs effectively to others (Smith, 2021). Furthermore, children with intellectual disabilities often face difficulties in making simple decisions, managing stress, and adjusting to changes in the school and home environment (Melin et al., 2022). These adaptive barriers make developing independence a focus of education for students with intellectual disabilities, as independence is a key foundation for social participation and long-term quality of life (Krahn et al., 2021).

In the context of formal education, special education schools (SLB) function as institutions that provide special education services through curriculum modifications, differentiated learning strategies, and pedagogical approaches tailored to the characteristics of children's needs (Saniputri et al., 2025). The curriculum in SLB is designed to accommodate limitations while optimizing student potential, so that the school functions not only as a conveyor of academic material but also as a means of developing life skills and independence (Kauffman et al., 2023). In this context, the quality of curriculum and learning management is greatly influenced by the leadership of the principal as the determinant of educational policy direction (Bush, 2020). The principal plays a role in setting the vision, coordinating teachers, managing resources, and ensuring that learning is relevant to the developmental needs of children with intellectual disabilities. Meanwhile, teachers hold a strategic position as key actors who interact directly with students and translate curriculum policies into meaningful learning practices (Sapon-Shevin & SooHoo, 2020). Learning effectiveness is largely determined by the teacher's ability to design learning experiences that are adaptive, responsive, and appropriate to the individual abilities of students with special needs.

One important approach in educating children with intellectual disabilities is contextual teaching and learning (CTL). This approach utilizes students' everyday experiences as a starting point for understanding new concepts, making learning more meaningful (Ulum & Syafi'i, 2022). By connecting material to real-life activities such as eating, dressing, or grooming, children with intellectual disabilities can interpret the learning process as relevant to their lives (Sharma & Kaur, 2025). CTL has also been shown to improve information retention, student engagement, and the transfer of knowledge into real-life contexts—critical aspects for developing independence (Manurung et al., 2024). The relevance of contextual learning is further strengthened because children with intellectual disabilities are generally more responsive to experiential learning than to verbal or text-based approaches (Gerzel-Short & Conderman, 2019).

Independence in children with special needs can be developed gradually through systematic self-development exercises, such as the ability to eat independently, maintain personal hygiene, dress, and tidy personal belongings (Polloway et al., 2017). This development process requires structured routines, teacher modeling, positive reinforcement, and visual aids to facilitate understanding (Cooper et al., 2020). Emotional support and motivation from parents and teachers also play a significant role in increasing children's self-confidence when engaging in independent activities (Saleh et al., 2022). The primary goal of this independence development is to help children reduce their dependence on others so they can live their daily lives with greater independence and dignity.

However, various previous studies have shown a research gap regarding the implementation of contextual approaches in developing the independence of children with intellectual disabilities. First, most previous research has focused on behavioral therapy-based interventions, conventional self-development training, or modifications to the learning environment to increase student independence (Cooper et al., 2020). Studies on the use of contextual approaches in learning for children with intellectual disabilities are still relatively limited and have not comprehensively explained how CTL can foster independence through meaningful learning experiences. Second, research examining the role of school management—particularly principal leadership in creating contextual learning environments—is still very rare. Yet, the success of learning in special needs schools (SLB) is significantly influenced by curriculum management, supervision, teacher facilitation, and the allocation of educational resources (Dexter & Richardson, 2020).

Third, some research focuses solely on the pedagogical aspects of teachers, without considering their integration with the school management system holistically (Mahmud, 2021). A contextual approach requires strong organizational support, from program planning and teacher coordination to the provision of authentic learning media and ongoing supervision. Unfortunately, research examining the relationship between school management and the effectiveness of CTL in developing the independence of children with intellectual disabilities is still minimal. Fourth, previous research also rarely links the contextual approach to long-term development goals, such as adaptive skills, emotional regulation, and social skills in children with intellectual disabilities—even though these aspects are the main foundations of independence (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2017). Thus, there is an urgent need to conduct research that integrates pedagogical and managerial perspectives in the context of education for children with intellectual disabilities.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to provide deeper empirical and theoretical contributions. The purpose of this study is to analyze the application of a contextual learning approach in developing the independence of children with intellectual disabilities in Special Schools, with a focus on how the roles of teachers, principals, and school management support the implementation of meaningful learning. Specifically,

this study aims to: (1) identify contextual learning strategies used by teachers in training the independence of children with intellectual disabilities; (2) examine how principals manage and direct the learning process through planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising; and (3) analyze the impact of contextual learning on improving students' self-development skills and independence. With this approach, this study is expected to bridge the gap in previous research while providing a learning and school management model that can be adopted by other special schools in improving the quality of educational services for children with intellectual disabilities.

From a theoretical perspective, this research offers a contribution in the form of developing a new perspective on the integration of contextual approaches with modern educational management theory, particularly in the context of special education. Practically, the results are expected to provide implementable recommendations for teachers, principals, and policymakers in designing contextual learning that can sustainably enhance the independence of children with intellectual disabilities. Thus, this research not only fills gaps in the existing literature but also provides a new direction for the development of a more humanistic inclusive education model oriented toward empowering students with special needs.

METHOD

The research method used in this study is descriptive. This research was conducted to describe and analyze data to identify general trends that can be used as material for further study. This study aims to describe and analyze how contextual approaches are managed for independent learning for children with special needs and intellectual disabilities. This descriptive study is expected to identify the conditions, opinions, and processes involved in managing contextual approaches for independent learning for children with special needs and intellectual disabilities (Ghanad, 2023).

The data sources required for this study can be categorized into two groups: primary data obtained from supervisors, principals, teachers, students, and the community; while secondary data were obtained from documents in the form of tables, meeting minutes, photographs, films, video recordings, the internet, and other sources that can support the primary data. Data analysis techniques are the process of organizing data so that it can be interpreted and made more meaningful. Data analysis in this study was conducted during data collection and after data collection for a certain period. During the interview, the researcher analyzed the interviewee's answers. If the interviewee's answers after analysis were deemed unsatisfactory, the researcher would continue the questioning until a certain stage was obtained that deemed credible data. Activities in qualitative data analysis were interactive and continued until complete, so that the data reached saturation. Activities in data analysis included data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, and were carried out based on an interactive model.

In testing the validity of research, the principle is the same as in quantitative research: a study will not be valid if it is not reliable, and qualitative research will not be transferable if it does not meet the requirements of dependability. Therefore, data validity is an important concept that has evolved from the concepts of validity and reliability. Data validity testing (trustworthiness) is carried out through data calibration in the form of checking using inspection techniques (Fischer et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results at Nike Ardila Special Needs School, Bandung City

This study comprehensively examines the implementation of contextual-based special needs learning programs to improve the independence of students with intellectual disabilities at the Nike Ardila Special Needs School in Bandung City, focusing on six main components of learning management: planning, organizing, implementing, supervising, problems encountered, and developed solutions. A contextual approach was chosen because a relevant and experience-oriented learning environment has been shown to be more effective in supporting the development of independence in children with intellectual disabilities (Selwyn et al., 2017). This type of learning requires teachers to create a bridge between academic concepts and real-life routines, so that students not only understand the material cognitively but are also able to apply it practically in daily activities such as dressing, washing dishes, or managing personal hygiene (Agbaedeng et al., 2021).

The results of the study indicate that contextual learning planning at Nike Ardila Special School (SLB Nike Ardila) is formulated by adapting material to students' real-life experiences, particularly regarding self-development activities, which are the primary focus of developing independence. Teachers

develop learning plans through curriculum modifications and lesson plan adaptations tailored to students' intellectual development levels. In the context of special education, planning is not only oriented towards learning outcomes but also considers motor skills, emotional regulation, and the individual needs of each student (Stalmach et al., 2023). Teachers formulate activities that involve direct experience, exploration, the use of visual media, and simple discussions to strengthen student understanding. This experience-based approach aligns with contextual learning theory, which emphasizes that meaningful understanding emerges when students are able to connect material to their concrete experiences (Reddy & Revathy, 2024). In practice, teachers ensure that learning objectives are derived from students' basic abilities and linked to realistic activities, such as dressing, arranging dishes, or cleaning. This demonstrates that planning is not simply an administrative document but a pedagogical strategy oriented towards students' functional independence.

Learning at the Nike Ardila Special Needs School (SLB Nike Ardila) is organized through the arrangement of human resources, media, time, and the learning environment. Teachers are assigned based on competencies, interests, and training relevant to the types of disabilities faced by students, as recommended in special education practices (Starks & Reich, 2023). Teacher training is conducted periodically by the Training Center, focusing on learning strategies, curriculum modifications, and authentic assessments. Organization also includes the development of simple media by teachers due to limited learning resources. This demonstrates the importance of creative initiative in the education of children with special needs, where learning success is largely determined by the teacher's ability to adapt aids to the student's capacity (Goyibova et al., 2025). The learning environment is also organized adaptively; classrooms are arranged to allow students to move freely without disturbing others, while teaching materials are presented in the form of visuals, puzzles, or live demonstrations that are accessible to students with intellectual disabilities.

Contextual learning is implemented by prioritizing direct experience and practical activities relevant to students' lives. Teachers use play, demonstrations, practical tasks, and repetitive exercises to ensure students understand the steps in self-development activities. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's view that learning for children with special needs must involve scaffolding or structured support to maximize developmental potential (Vygotsky & N, 1978). During the learning process, teachers utilize media such as projectors, laptops, and visual aids to facilitate student understanding. Teachers also provide opportunities for students to take short walks when they lose focus, a common self-regulation strategy used in the education of children with intellectual disabilities (Kauffman et al., 2024). The variety of learning methods, the use of educational games, and the integration of light physical activity help increase student engagement and motivation, while reducing boredom, which is often a barrier to learning.

Learning supervision is carried out by the principal through formal supervision and informal monitoring. Formal supervision is carried out through classroom observations based on established instruments. Meanwhile, informal monitoring is conducted through post-lesson discussions, which serve to help teachers reflect on their teaching practices. This supervision model aligns with the principles of modern educational supervision, which emphasize collaborative processes and teacher empowerment (Gordon, 2022). Supervision results at the Nike Ardila Special School (SLB) show that teachers are increasingly consistent in implementing contextual learning and are more reflective in evaluating the effectiveness of activities. Systematic supervision also helps ensure that learning objectives are achieved and student independence is gradually increasing. Continuous supervision is evidence that the school's educational management effectively applies supervisory principles to its learning management.

Research has identified several barriers to implementing contextual learning, particularly related to differences in students' levels of intellectual disability. Each student has different motor, cognitive, and emotional abilities, requiring teachers to devote more time to providing individualized understanding and practice. Children with intellectual disabilities often require repeated repetition and intensive support to understand the steps of activities such as dressing or washing dishes (McLay et al., 2021). Barriers also arise from learning environments that are not fully supportive, such as limited teaching aids appropriate to students' needs or inflexible classrooms. Limited infrastructure is a common challenge in special education in Indonesia, impacting the effectiveness of contextual learning (Widiastuti, 2025). Students' emotional factors, such as boredom, difficulty focusing, or the emergence of maladaptive behavior, also present barriers that require specific management strategies.

The school and teachers' solution to address these barriers is to use a flexible and adaptive approach. Teachers provide step-by-step instructions (task analysis), provide visual cues, and repeat commands

consistently. These techniques have proven effective in fostering independence in children with intellectual disabilities (Desideri et al., 2021). Teachers also modify learning media to be simpler yet more functional for student understanding. Furthermore, educational game strategies are used to increase motivation and prevent boredom. When students lose concentration, teachers provide opportunities for movement breaks, an approach that aligns with the principles of universal design for learning (Craig et al., 2022). The school also strives to optimize teacher training to continuously develop their skills in managing students with intellectual disabilities. An integrated solution combining pedagogical approaches, classroom management, and emotional support has been shown to increase the effectiveness of independent learning at the Nike Ardila Special Needs School.

Research Results at Bina Kasih Special Needs School, Bandung

The implementation of contextual learning at SLB Bina Kasih Bandung demonstrates how the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach can be effectively adapted for children with special needs, particularly those with intellectual disabilities. Essentially, CTL emphasizes the connection between subject matter and the real-life context of students' lives to make learning more meaningful and foster independence (Yusyac et al., 2021). In the context of special education, this principle is crucial because students with intellectual disabilities require direct, concrete experiences to understand academic concepts and functional skills (Smith, 2018). Therefore, SLB Bina Kasih Bandung implements CTL with a highly adaptive approach, including individualized learning, the use of assistive technology, supportive therapy, and social skills and self-development training.

In practice, contextual learning at this special needs school integrates learning materials with students' real-life experiences. For example, students are not only taught concepts verbally but are also encouraged to directly apply this knowledge in everyday situations such as shopping, grooming, simple cooking, or engaging in social interactions in the community around the school. This approach aligns with constructivism theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is built through direct experience and active student processes (Vygotsky & N, 1978). Real-life experiential learning strategies have also proven effective in enhancing conceptual understanding and independence in students with special needs because they learn through concrete activities that can be observed, felt, and repeated (Lin et al., 2025). Thus, SLB Bina Kasih Bandung places real-world experiences at the heart of the student learning process.

Observations, interviews, and documentation studies indicate that the learning planning stage is a crucial foundation for implementing a contextually based independence program. The principal, vice principal for curriculum, and skills teachers are involved in developing a structured, sustainable, and individualized learning plan oriented to students' individual needs. This planning includes mapping initial abilities, identifying special needs, determining independent learning objectives, and developing realistic and measurable learning steps. According to O'Donnell, comprehensive planning is a determining factor in the success of educational programs for children with intellectual disabilities because it ensures that learning activities are aligned with the students' cognitive developmental abilities and psychosocial conditions (O'Donnell, 2020). At SLB Bina Kasih Bandung, the planning process also includes coordination with parents and experts, such as occupational therapists or school psychologists, to ensure that the learning program is truly holistic and relevant to the children's daily lives.

Furthermore, supervision in contextual-based learning plays a crucial role in ensuring the quality of CTL implementation in the classroom. Supervision is conducted by schools to ensure that teachers implement adaptive, comprehensive, and sensitive learning strategies to the needs of students with intellectual disabilities. According to Glickman (2018), learning supervision not only assesses teacher performance but also provides support, feedback, and professional development so that teachers are able to design and implement meaningful learning (Glickman & Hall, 2018). In the context of SLB Bina Kasih Bandung, supervision includes monitoring the use of learning aids, live demonstrations, media variations, and the appropriateness of methods to student characteristics. Teachers are also encouraged to collaborate with parents and the surrounding community so that learning activities are truly relevant to the context of students' lives.

Effective supervision is based on the core principles of contextual learning. First, the principle of understanding individual needs. Teachers are expected to understand the specific needs of each student, including their potential, obstacles, and learning styles. This individual approach is supported by the theory of differential education, which emphasizes that learning must be tailored to the unique characteristics and needs

of each child (Tomlinson, 2014). Second, the principle of creating a supportive environment. A safe, comfortable, and emotionally supportive learning environment is crucial in the education of children with special needs because it can increase motivation and self-confidence (Polloway et al., 2017). , the principle of adaptive learning. Teachers must adapt learning activities to students' abilities so that learning objectives can be achieved gradually through scaffolding or the provision of targeted assistance (Turner & Bruner, 1986). In practice, teachers at SLB Bina Kasih Bandung use demonstration methods, modeling, repeated practice, and direct application in the school environment or surrounding community.

Based on the analysis of the implementation of contextual-based special needs learning programs, it was found that supporting factors played a significant role in the success of the program at SLB Bina Kasih Bandung. These supporting factors include the availability of adequate learning facilities, such as a skills room, a practice kitchen, a self-development area, and visual learning media specifically designed for children with intellectual disabilities. Adequate physical facilities accelerate student understanding because they can practice directly in an environment that resembles real life (Kauffman et al., 2018). In addition, engaging and easy-to-understand learning methods, such as the use of concrete images, learning videos, simulations, and educational games, help students with special needs understand concepts that might be too abstract if presented conventionally. The use of multisensory media such as this is in line with research showing that students with intellectual disabilities more easily understand information when presented through a combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning (Whiting et al., 2015).

Another supporting factor is teacher competence in managing contextual learning. Teachers at SLB Bina Kasih Bandung are reported to have a good understanding of the principles of individualized learning, curriculum modification, and teaching techniques based on real-life experiences. Teacher competence is one of the keys to the success of special education, as emphasized by Forlin and Chambers (2011) who stated that special education teachers require specialized skills such as curriculum adaptation, authentic assessment, behavior management, and the ability to collaborate with parents and other professionals (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Furthermore, a collaborative and supportive school culture strengthens the implementation of contextual learning by creating a work environment that facilitates the exchange of ideas, reflection, and continuous improvement of teacher competence.

However, in addition to supporting factors, this study also found inhibiting factors that affect the effectiveness of contextual learning for students with intellectual disabilities. One common inhibiting factor is limited learning time. Contextual activities, especially those involving hands-on practice or field trips, require more time than traditional learning. According to Kolb, experiential learning for students with special needs requires a more intensive and repetitive process to truly grasp concepts (Kolb, 2014). Therefore, limited time allocation can hinder the internalization of independence skills.

Furthermore, uneven parental involvement is also a challenge. Some parents are fully supportive, while others are less involved due to limited knowledge, time, or socioeconomic conditions. Yet, parental involvement is crucial in the education of children with special needs because independence skills need to be consistently practiced at home (Jigyel et al., 2019). Another obstacle identified is the highly heterogeneous nature of student abilities, requiring teachers to design strategies that are truly flexible and adaptive. This demands a high level of teacher creativity, but not all teachers are able to meet these demands, especially when the workload is high.

Overall, the implementation of contextual learning at SLB Bina Kasih Bandung has shown positive results, particularly in improving students' self-development, social skills, and functional independence. CTL has been shown to help students with intellectual disabilities better understand concepts because they learn through real-life experiences relevant to their daily lives. This increased independence aligns with the goals of modern special education, which are to prepare children with special needs to live independently and participate optimally in society (Aprilia & Soendari, 2020). With the support of adequate facilities, adaptive learning methods, and the role of competent teachers, SLB Bina Kasih Bandung is able to become a model for good practice in implementing CTL in special education environments.

Planning

Planning is the main foundation in the entire process of implementing contextual learning at SLB Nike Ardila, especially in order to increase the independence of students with special needs. In the context of special education, planning is understood not only as the formulation of learning objectives and steps, but also as a strategic process that integrates individual student needs, school policies, curriculum, and available

resources (Nilsen, 2017). At SLB Nike Ardila, contextual learning planning is designed to ensure the connection of the subject matter with the real life of students, so that each skill taught truly has functional relevance in everyday life. This principle of relevance is the basis of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach, which prioritizes direct experience and the application of concepts in real activities (TriLaksono et al., 2025).

Conceptually, contextual learning requires teachers to understand that students with special needs, especially those with intellectual or visual impairments, require concrete, structured, and hands-on learning strategies. Therefore, planning at Nike Ardila Special Needs School involves identifying individual student needs, selecting practice-based methods, and providing instructional media that suit their learning styles. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory, which emphasizes that learning becomes more meaningful when students engage in authentic activities through social interaction and scaffolding, or gradual support from teachers (Vygotsky & N, 1978).

In the context of Nike Ardila Special Needs School, contextual learning planning begins with defining the teaching material and connecting it to the students' life contexts. Teachers not only develop Lesson Plans (RPPs) but also map out students' daily life situations, such as personal routines, social interactions, and household activities, which can be used as learning media. For example, learning about personal hygiene is linked to activities such as washing dishes, tidying clothes, or keeping the classroom clean. This real-life integration aims to enable students to concretely understand concepts and have the opportunity to practice them in a safe and structured environment. This is consistent with Westwood's (2015) statement that students with intellectual disabilities more easily understand and retain information when they are involved in hands-on activities that resemble everyday life experiences (Westwood, 2016).

In addition to connecting teaching materials to students' life contexts, contextual learning planning at Nike Ardila Special Needs School also involves exploration, inquiry, and group discussions. Although students with special needs have varying levels of ability, teachers still position them as active participants in the learning process. For example, students are invited to observe the process of washing dishes, discuss the steps, and then practice independently using a step-by-step approach, ranging from teacher demonstrations to individual practice. Dyer (2016) states that inquiry-based learning does not have to be abstract; it can be designed simply while still providing space for students to ask questions, experiment, and reflect (Dyer, 2021). This approach is particularly relevant for special needs students because it provides them with the opportunity to understand the cause-and-effect relationships of their actions.

In addition to hands-on experience strategies, the use of visual media and multisensory aids is an important component of learning planning at Nike Ardila Special Needs School. Teachers use media such as sequential images, short videos, cutlery models, and instruction cards to clarify activity stages. The majority of students with special needs experience weaknesses in abstraction, so concrete and visual media significantly help them understand concepts and work steps. In a lesson on washing cutlery, for example, the teacher provides images showing the washing steps, from picking up cutlery, applying soap, brushing, rinsing, to drying and reassembling. Students with visual impairments receive detailed verbal instructions and tactile support so they can remain actively engaged in the practical experience. This approach aligns with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which emphasize flexibility in providing access to learning through various representations (Levey, 2023).

The contextual learning planning implemented at Nike Ardila Special Needs School (SLB) does not stand alone, but rather is within the framework of school policies, curriculum, and independence competency standards stipulated in the Educational Objective Completion Criteria (KKTP). This formal framework serves as a legal umbrella and guideline for designing systematic and measurable learning programs. According to Suandy (2001), planning is the process of determining organizational goals and the strategies, tactics, and actions needed to achieve them comprehensively (Suandy, 2001). In the context of SLB, this means that learning planning must be aligned with the school's vision of developing student independence, the special education curriculum (PPDBK/SLB version of the independent curriculum), and the teachers' abilities to implement it.

Thus, contextual learning planning at Nike Ardila Special Needs School is a multidimensional process involving needs analysis, independence goal setting, experience-based activity development, and selection of appropriate strategies and media. Teachers develop not only cognitive learning objectives but also practical ones, such as the ability to wash dishes, recognize kitchen equipment, maintain personal hygiene, or interact

socially politely. This approach aligns with a key point in special education, namely that learning programs must be oriented toward students' functioning and independence in real life (Kauffman et al., 2018).

The most concrete example of planning implementation is seen in the lesson on washing cutlery in grade III. The teacher designed a structured lesson, starting with preparing materials such as cutlery, soap, clean water, cloths, and a drying rack. The teacher opened the lesson with a brief explanation of the importance of clean cutlery, then demonstrated the washing steps slowly while providing clear verbal instructions. Afterward, students were asked to practice independently with minimal assistance. Students with visual impairments were given tactile guidance, such as holding their hands while moving the sponge or rinsing the cutlery. This type of learning not only taught technical skills but also built students' confidence and independence because they felt capable of performing daily activities relevant to their lives. This supports the findings of Bryant et al. (2015) that concrete practice in functional learning can increase self-efficacy and the development of adaptive skills in students with special needs (Bryant, 2015).

Learning planning also establishes measurable indicators of success. Teachers determine that success is not only assessed by whether or not eating utensils are clean, but also by students' ability to follow the work steps with gradual independence. Authentic assessments like this, according to Wiggins, are important in contextual learning because they provide a more accurate picture of the extent to which students are able to apply knowledge in real-life situations (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). This aligns with the school's goal of developing students' functional skills so they can live independently at home and in social settings.

Furthermore, contextual learning planning at Nike Ardila Special Needs School also considers collaborative aspects between teachers, parents, and the school environment. Teachers need to ensure that competencies taught in school can be consistently practiced at home. Parental involvement is crucial because students with special needs require regular repetition to form habits (Fathan Fahmi et al., 2024). Therefore, during the planning stage, teachers often provide simple guidance to parents regarding activities that need to be practiced at home, such as washing dishes, brushing teeth, or making the bed.

Contextual learning planning at SLB Nike Ardila illustrates that the planning process is not merely administrative preparation, but rather a strategic activity oriented towards individual student needs, relevance to life contexts, and sustainability of learning. The accuracy of this planning is a solid foundation in efforts to increase the independence of students with special needs, because without thorough planning, learning will lose direction and result in not achieving the desired independence goals (Bateman & Bateman, 2014). Through comprehensive, systematic, and needs-based planning, SLB Nike Ardila has emphasized that special education must be based on a functional, adaptive, and contextual approach in order to achieve optimal independence for each student.

Organizing

Organization in contextually based special needs program learning is a structural foundation that determines the effectiveness of the implementation of the entire educational process, especially in increasing the independence of students with intellectual disabilities in Special Needs Schools (SLB). In this context, organization is not only understood as an administrative process to determine who does what, but rather as a systemic strategy to ensure that every element of learning—teachers, students, facilities, curriculum, and learning environment—functions synergistically towards the goal of independence for children with special needs (Mahdi & Nassar, 2021). In line with Mulyasana's (2012) view, the learning process is the entire activity designed to teach students in an interactive, inspiring, enjoyable, challenging, and motivating manner (Mulyasana, 2012). Within this framework, organization is a crucial instrument for directing the entire process so that it is structured, oriented towards individual student needs, and capable of creating meaningful learning experiences (Leithwood et al., 2021).

In practice, in many special education schools (SLB), including Nike Ardila Special Education School and Bina Kasih Special Education School in Bandung, the organization of learning faces significant challenges, particularly the limited number of teachers with a background in Special Education (PLB). The absence of a division of special teaching tasks based on PLB pedagogical competency results in teacher distribution being based more on teaching decrees (SK) and maximum teaching hours, rather than on specialization or competence in handling children with intellectual disabilities. This situation makes the organization of learning less than optimal in accommodating the diversity of children's needs, especially when independent learning requires a very specific, consistent, and sustainable approach. Yet, one of the main principles of organization

in both inclusive and special education is the appropriate placement of teachers according to the competencies and characteristics of students (Majoko, 2019).

This weakness in teacher organization directly impacts the quality of contextual learning services. Teachers without a background in special education often struggle to implement differentiation strategies, therapeutic communication, behavior management, and adaptive media use. Consequently, independent learning, which should be geared toward developing positive habits, self-regulation, and children's ability to adapt to everyday life, is suboptimal. Contextual learning, however, requires targeted planning, intensive guidance, and individualized and ongoing needs analysis (Dunleavy et al., 2018). Thus, non-competency-based organization is a systemic barrier to the implementation of independent learning.

Referring to the concept of independent learning goals as proposed by Raschke and Bronson in Marthan (2007), the organization of learning should be able to accommodate four main goals: for children with special needs, the school, teachers, and the community (Marthan, 2007). From the perspective of children with special needs, the organization of learning needs to ensure that they have learning experiences that enable them to feel part of the community, access a variety of learning resources, increase self-esteem, and expand social opportunities (Vetoniemi & Kärnä, 2021). This requires classroom organization, learning schedules, teacher task allocation, and the determination of learning media that enable meaningful interactions between students and their environment. Without good organization, these goals are difficult to achieve, because children do not receive the continuity of stimuli that suit their developmental needs.

From a school perspective, organizing special needs programs contributes to managing diversity, fostering empathy, and developing sensitivity to individual needs. Schools that organize learning effectively will have an academic culture that is inclusive, adaptive, and responsive to differences. This aligns with the concept of an inclusive school culture, which emphasizes collaboration, coordination, and a clear division of roles among all stakeholders (Ainscow, 2020). However, in many cases, schools lack a robust internal coordination system, leaving teachers often working alone without adequate structural support.

For teachers, organizing learning provides an opportunity to develop professionalism, creativity, and pedagogical capacity. Teachers are required to be able to design new learning methods, develop curriculum adaptations, and develop appropriate media. When organizing is done well—for example, through routine coordination, clear role allocation, ongoing training, and the provision of resources—teachers will be more motivated and feel challenged to improve their performance. This is important considering that teachers are key actors in contextual learning, which requires flexibility, improvisation based on student needs, and the use of a multisensory approach (Tomlinson, 2017). However, when organizing is weak—especially due to a lack of specialized training—teachers struggle to implement effective learning for students with intellectual disabilities.

The organization of learning also has a broad impact on society. When independent learning is successful, the community benefits by increasing social equality, fostering empathy, strengthening democratic values, and fostering more harmonious social relations. Therefore, a good learning organization structure should involve the community and parents as partners in the educational process. In contextual learning, particularly in self-development skills (such as washing dishes, dressing, or tidying up), family involvement is crucial for strengthening habits at home (Pöllänen & Voutilainen, 2018). However, in practice, special needs schools often experience limited communication and coordination with parents, resulting in suboptimal habits outside of school (Wilujeng et al., 2020).

In the context of SLB, organizing contextually based independent learning includes several core components: (1) determining the learning structure, (2) dividing teacher tasks and functions, (3) managing facilities and infrastructure, (4) managing classes and schedules, and (5) coordinating mechanisms between stakeholders. The contextual learning structure requires a clear flow from orientation, exploration, direct practice, reflection, to authentic evaluation. Teachers and educational staff need to have the same understanding of these steps so that learning is consistent and sustainable.

Organizing infrastructure is also crucial, as independent learning, such as washing dishes, dressing, or cleaning oneself, requires tangible tools and materials, not just verbal explanations. When adequate resources are not available, teachers often substitute them with makeshift tools, thus reducing learning effectiveness. In the context of contextual learning, resources are not only technical support but also media for forming adaptive habits and behaviors (Dewi, 2020).

Furthermore, classroom management for children with intellectual disabilities must be structured by considering student characteristics such as short attention spans, boredom, a tendency toward repetitive

behavior, or difficulty understanding complex instructions. Therefore, the organization of schedules, activity durations, transitions between activities, and classroom use must be specifically designed. A rotation system for activities, for example, can prevent children from becoming bored. Seating arrangements and movement spaces also affect student concentration and comfort. This organization of space and time is crucial in contextual learning, as hands-on activities require flexible spaces and are not limited to traditional classroom patterns.

The final component is coordination between stakeholders, both internal and external to the school. Internal school collaboration includes collaboration between teachers, assistant teachers, therapists, and the principal. External collaboration includes parents, healthcare workers, and social institutions. In independent learning, success is largely determined by the consistency of habituation across environments. Therefore, intensive communication and an integrated monitoring system need to be carefully organized. When coordination is weak, successful learning at school does not continue at home or in the community, making it difficult for children to achieve functional independence.

Overall, this analysis concludes that organization is a crucial aspect of contextually based special needs learning programs. Good organization is not solely oriented toward formal structures, but must also focus on individual student needs, teacher competency, facility readiness, and cross-environment collaboration. With solid organization, the goal of independent learning for children with special needs can be optimally achieved, in line with the principles of inclusive, humanistic, and experience-based education.

Implementation

The implementation of contextual-based special needs program learning in increasing the independence of students with intellectual disabilities in SLB is implemented in the preparation of lesson plans for educational providers who see from students with special needs who are in each class with what kind of obstacles for that reason the lesson plan is prepared in the form of adjustments to the learning achievements of the students themselves. Then the teaching aids in supporting the implementation of independent learning are currently only electronic media such as projectors and laptops and guidebooks. The development of contextual-based special needs program learning methods in increasing the independence of students with intellectual disabilities in SLB uses the bedlarning method which is more on practice and produces a product in learning.

The process of implementing contextual-based learning activities to increase the independence of SLB students with intellectual disabilities includes planning that identifies and assesses student needs, preparing individual programs based on assessment results, using contextual strategies such as daily task simulations and visual media, and continuous evaluation to monitor the development of student independence.

The implementation of contextual-based learning to increase the independence of SLB students begins with the preparation of lesson plans for the school. This aims to see the students with special needs in each class with what types of obstacles are encountered, so that lesson plans are prepared in the form of adjustments to the learning outcomes of the students themselves. This is as stated by Mahmuti "Implementation is an action to ensure that all group members strive wholeheartedly to achieve targets in accordance with Warsita, with managerial planning and organizational efforts." (Mahmuti et al., 2025).

Mobilization is the effort to direct or mobilize the workforce or manpower and utilize available facilities to carry out work simultaneously. This function motivates subordinates or workers to work diligently so that organizational goals can be achieved effectively. This function is crucial for realizing organizational goals, including the goal of implementing contextual-based learning to increase the independence of special needs students (Warsita, 2018).

Supervision

Contextual-based special needs program learning supervision for students with intellectual disabilities focuses on aligning learning materials with real-world situations to enhance their independence. The goal is to enable students to connect knowledge with everyday applications, achieved through strategies such as using visual instructions, task demonstrations, social skills training, and creating a positive and supportive learning environment.

Schools monitor the implementation of contextually-based special needs programs to enhance the independence of students with intellectual disabilities to assess the success of the learning process. Monitoring of the implementation of independent learning is generally carried out on both the process and the

program. Both supervisory approaches are implemented by each school, with an emphasis on the implementation of independent learning within the school. This aligns with Handoko's definition of supervision as follows:

Management control is a systematic effort to establish implementation standards with planning objectives, design feedback information systems, compare reality with previously established standards, determine and measure deviations and take necessary corrective actions to ensure that all company resources are used in the most effective and efficient way in achieving objectives (Handoko, 2003).

Supervision is useful for systematic planning to ensure that evaluations proceed as needed or planned. To carry out this evaluation process, managerial tools are needed because any errors in the process can be immediately corrected. Furthermore, these evaluation tools serve to ensure the supervision process meets the needs. In this case, it achieves the learning objectives of contextual-based special needs programs to enhance student independence.

The supervision of independent learning for children with special needs is carried out as follows: First, supervision of the learning process carried out by the school, starting from the planning stage, organization, and implementation. This process is carried out in order to measure the suitability between the implementation and the independent learning plan. The supervision of the process is carried out in an integrated manner through daily, mid-semester, and end-of-semester supervision. This form of supervision is by identifying the development of student behavioral hierarchy achievements over time through identification and observation, both in the classroom and outside the classroom during the independent learning activities. In-class supervision involves special guidance teachers and students with special needs. While outside the classroom involves the principal, vice principal, other teachers, and education staff. Meanwhile, supervision at home involves students, parents or guardians. Second, supervision of the independent learning program at the school to determine the achievement of targets from the overall objectives of the learning program activities for children with special needs to develop an independent attitude. The implementation is carried out by the school at the end of each school year with the involvement of the entire school community. This is expected to produce objective supervision results to provide references for future improvements. This supervision aims to produce the best service for students with special needs.

From the description above, it can be concluded that supervision aims to ensure that students with special needs (PDBK) receive the best service through an approach that suits their needs, such as independent learning, curriculum adjustments and learning methods, collaboration between teachers and parents, as well as emotional support and a supportive learning environment, so that they can achieve their optimal potential and they will be more independent.

The main problems in contextual-based special needs program learning to increase the independence of students with intellectual disabilities in SLB include: lack of teacher understanding of student needs, limited resources such as media and facilities, difficulties in managing student behavior and communication, and lack of support from parents and effective cooperation.

Teacher and learning challenges include: 1) Teacher Understanding: Teachers often lack a deep understanding of the characteristics and learning styles of students with intellectual disabilities, making it difficult to provide appropriate educational services; 2) Resource Limitations: There is a lack of resources such as visual learning media, supporting facilities, and training for teachers in managing special needs classes; 3) Curriculum and Learning Management: There are obstacles in curriculum management and determining appropriate learning methods for students with varying levels of intellectual disabilities; 4) Behavioral Problems: Students with intellectual disabilities can exhibit behavioral problems that are difficult to manage and require special discipline that is challenging for teachers; 5) Student and environmental challenges include: 1) Focus and Communication: Students with intellectual disabilities often have difficulty focusing on learning and communicating, which hinders social interaction and the learning process; and b) Low Independence.

Intellectual barriers and limited supporting factors, students' independence in daily life is often still low. Challenges of support from the environment include: 1) The Role of Parents: Lack of support and understanding of parents towards the needs and potential of children with intellectual disabilities can be an obstacle in increasing student independence. 2) Lack of Collaboration: The absence of effective collaboration between teachers, schools, and parents can hinder the creation of a supportive and consistent learning environment for students.

Factors that become obstacles in learning contextual-based special needs programs in increasing the independence of students with intellectual disabilities in SLB in 2 (two) schools include: 1) Parents' expectations are too high (not in accordance with the child's abilities), parents are less cooperative so there is no continuity between the program at school and at home; 2) Not all class teachers understand what methods should be applied to certain children. Sometimes it is difficult to describe it in a written form that is 'comfortable' to read, especially by parents of children with special needs; 3) Uncertain moods and behavior of children with special needs; 4) Sometimes there are differences of opinion between class teachers and management in managing the independent learning program; 4) Lack of media tools and support from the environment and community in improving the quality of independent learning in Bandung City; 5) There are still many shortages of class teachers and welfare and support in improving the quality of independent learning is still lacking, we use what is available without reducing learning.

These obstacles are relatively the same felt by both schools, considering that both schools are schools that provide independent learning. These are the common obstacles faced by the organizers of independent learning. This is in line with Tarmansyah, who stated that there are several symptoms that can be used as an indicator in recognizing children early, which include the following: 1) Based on behavior: behavior reflects a person's abilities, understanding, knowledge and skills. Through behavior we can observe a person's abilities; and Based on physical condition: physical condition also reflects the general condition of the child, whether the child is sick, disabled, or other physical conditions are weak either due to psychological or neurological factors; 3) Based on complaints: usually children who have problems often complain, have difficulty doing questions, are lazy to study, get angry, have headaches, have stomach aches, or are passive in stimulation; 4) Thus, the achievement of the objectives of implementing independent learning will have a significant impact, so that the achievement of the objectives of independent learning for children with special needs cannot produce optimal goals (Tarmansyah, 2007).

This inhibiting factor is a problem in providing maximum service for contextual-based special needs learning programs in increasing the independence of students with intellectual disabilities in SLB. This is not in line with Kotler who stated that it is "any action or activity that can be offered by one party to another (Kotler, 2005). Service is the behavior of producers in order to meet the needs and desires of consumers in order to achieve satisfaction for the consumers themselves. This behavior can occur during, before, and after the transaction."

Based on this, service quality can be defined as an action taken to fulfill consumer needs and desires and accurately deliver what consumers desire. This includes the quality of learning. Furthermore, it must receive attention from the school committee or parents to encourage optimal independent learning.

Learning is not simply the transfer of information from therapy to how to enable students to learn optimally. The teacher's role is certainly not merely as a learning resource, but also as a guide and servant to students. The implementation of education must be able to optimize the learning process in the classroom to accommodate the needs of children with special needs. This is as stated by Warsita, Gagne, Briggs, and Wagner in Winataputra that "the definition of learning is a series of activities designed to enable the learning process in students." In this definition, it is clear that learning is a complex process, not just the process of providing information from the teacher to students. There are a series of activities designed to enable students to learn (Winataputra, 2008). A series of activities in learning must of course be planned in advance and must be arranged as well as possible adapted to the context of the situation, material, student conditions, and the availability of learning media.

Solutions to overcome the obstacles of contextual-based special needs program learning in increasing the independence of SLB students with intellectual disabilities carried out in the 2 (two) Schools include the following: 1) Teachers and management always discuss all problems that exist in the school and find solutions regularly once a week; 2) Bringing in a team of experts to provide input to teachers, which can be in the form of seminars, training, workshops, etc.; 3) Class teachers create questions together with the curriculum development team at the school; 4) Cooperation and increasing independence in improving the quality of education by inviting teachers, principals, parents and the community to improve independent learning services; and 5) Optimizing the Kombel Team that has been formed according to the organizational structure, where all areas of the education office and schools are involved in it. This is related to making questions with the help of the nearest SLB in determining questions that are appropriate to students in each school in an organized manner.

This solution has an impact on overcoming problems that occur in the implementation of contextual-based special needs learning programs in increasing the independence of students with intellectual disabilities in SLB. This is in line with Mahmuti, that to ensure the implementation of the above functions, a concept and operational policy are needed to improve the quality of the implementation of educational services through various managerial approaches and methods. At the implementation level of the quality concept, that every educational unit in formal and non-formal pathways is required to carry out educational quality assurance (Mahmuti et al., 2025).

It is hoped that various improvements in contextual-based special needs program learning will enhance the independence of students with intellectual disabilities in SLB in the future and enable them to provide educational services to every student with special needs. These include peer discussions, participating in online seminars related to inclusivity, peer discussions, and online seminars related to inclusivity.

Referring to Government Regulation Number 19 of 2005, the learning process standards currently being developed, the activity environment for implementing an effective and efficient learning process includes planning the learning process, implementing the learning process, assessing learning outcomes, and monitoring the learning process. Quality learning is produced by quality teachers. Teachers' skills in managing the learning process are at the heart of the issue. Quality learning is effective learning, which essentially concerns the teacher's ability in the classroom learning process.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a sharp picture of how contextual-based learning management in two special needs schools—Nike Ardila and Bina Kasih Bandung—is able to increase the independence of students with intellectual disabilities through a systematic process of planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising. Answering the research questions, the main findings indicate that a contextual approach designed based on individual student needs, the use of real-life experiences as a basis for learning, and the involvement of teachers, principals, therapists, and parents play a significant role in shaping students' functional independence, from self-care to light social and vocational skills. Learning does not stop at conveying concepts, but links the material to daily activities such as dressing, eating, personal hygiene, simple shopping, and social interactions, so that students are able to internalize knowledge through repeated and structured concrete experiences.

Theoretically, this study expands the literature on the integration of educational management and the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach in special education—a field that has tended to be separated. This research confirms that the effectiveness of CTL is not solely determined by teachers' pedagogical methods, but is also strongly influenced by the quality of school management: principal leadership, resource organization strategies, cross-professional collaboration, and the sustainability of academic supervision. These findings reinforce the ideas of Nilsen (2017) and O'Donnell (2020) that learning for children with special needs is not simply a matter of method, but of the underlying managerial system.

Practically, this research has direct implications for special education providers. Teachers need to utilize step-by-step strategies (task analysis), visual media, multisensory cueing, demonstrations, repeated practice, and assistive technology to optimize the learning process. Principals must ensure the availability of relevant infrastructure, create flexible organizational arrangements, and ensure ongoing supervision. Furthermore, intensive communication between schools, parents, and support staff is crucial to ensuring the sustainability of independence habits outside of school.

However, this study has limitations. First, it used only a qualitative descriptive approach, so it did not measure the level of independence improvement quantitatively. Second, the study focused on two schools, so the transferability of the findings needs to be tested across special education schools with different characteristics. Third, the study did not explore differences in CTL implementation based on the level of intellectual disability in more detail.

For further research, mixed-methods studies are recommended to statistically measure the effectiveness of CTL, longitudinal studies to assess the sustainability of student independence into adulthood, and comparative research between public and private special education schools (SLB) to determine how differences in policy, leadership, and resources influence the success of contextual learning. Future research should also consider the integration of adaptive digital technologies, given the global trend in special education toward the use of AI and assistive technology in individualized learning for students with intellectual disabilities.

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