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## Fulfillment of Basic Needs for Children with Special Needs: A Case Study of Children with Autism at SLB Negeri 1 Makassar

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### Article Info:

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Submitted: 03 November 2025

Revised: 03 December 2025

Accepted: 10 December 2025

Publisher: 15 December

**Keywords:** Children with Autism, Basic Needs, Maslow, Special Education, SLB Negeri 1 Makassar.

### Abstract

Children with special needs, particularly those with autism, require comprehensive support to ensure that their basic physiological, emotional, social, and self-fulfillment needs are met within the educational setting. Ensuring the fulfillment of these needs is crucial for their growth, learning development, and long-term independence. This study examines the fulfillment of basic needs among children with autism at SLB Negeri 1 Makassar based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. A qualitative approach was employed using a case study design, with data collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Informants included teachers, the school principal, and parents. The findings reveal that the basic needs of children with autism are largely fulfilled through individualized learning programs, structured daily activities, emotional support from teachers, and active parental involvement. The school also provides a safe learning environment, specialized facilities, and vocational activities that foster students' potential and independence. Nevertheless, several challenges remain, including the limited availability of professional staff, inadequate facilities, and the diverse characteristics of the students. To address these challenges, the school implements individualized approaches, reward systems, and strong collaboration between the school and families. In conclusion, the fulfillment of basic needs for children with autism at SLB Negeri 1 Makassar has been carried out effectively through structured and collaborative strategies, although further efforts are required to enhance facilities and strengthen cross-sector cooperation.

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## 1. Introduction

Children are priceless assets of a nation; they are the future generation expected to carry forward the development and progress of the country. The quality of the next generation largely depends on how we, as adults, treat, nurture, and prepare them from an early age. One of the best investments we can make is ensuring that every child without

exception receives their rights, including the right to grow and develop optimally (Purwanto et al., 2020).

Every child has different characteristics and needs, including children with special needs. Children with special needs are those who experience limitations or exceptionalities that significantly affect their physical, mental, social, or emotional development compared to their peers. They require specific care and tailored interventions to reach their maximum potential in growth and learning experiences. Among children with special needs, those diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) represent a group that needs particular attention and support.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects how a person interacts and communicates with others. Its symptoms may appear at any age and across a range of severity. ASD is characterized by difficulties in social communication, repetitive behaviors, and restricted interests (World Health Organization [WHO], 2025). According to the most recent global estimates, approximately 61.8 million people worldwide were on the autism spectrum in 2021, equivalent to one in every 127 individuals (Santomauro et al., 2024). The global age-standardized prevalence was estimated at 788.3 per 100,000 people, with higher prevalence among males (1,064.7 per 100,000) compared to females (508.1 per 100,000). ASD was identified as one of the top ten causes of non-fatal health burden among people under 20 years globally (Santomauro et al., 2024; Global Burden of Disease Study 2021 Autism Spectrum Collaborators, 2025).

Children with ASD often face challenges in communication, social interaction, and exhibit restricted and repetitive behavior patterns. For this reason, fulfilling their basic needs becomes critically important to create an environment that supports their optimal development. In the educational context for children with autism, basic needs include access to nutritious food, adequate health and therapy services, a safe and supportive learning environment, and learning methods that accommodate their unique learning styles, in line with the theoretical framework of needs hierarchy proposed by Maslow.

SLB Negeri 1 Makassar is a special-needs school that provides educational services for children with various disabilities, including visual impairment, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, physical disability, and autism spectrum disorder. A key priority in

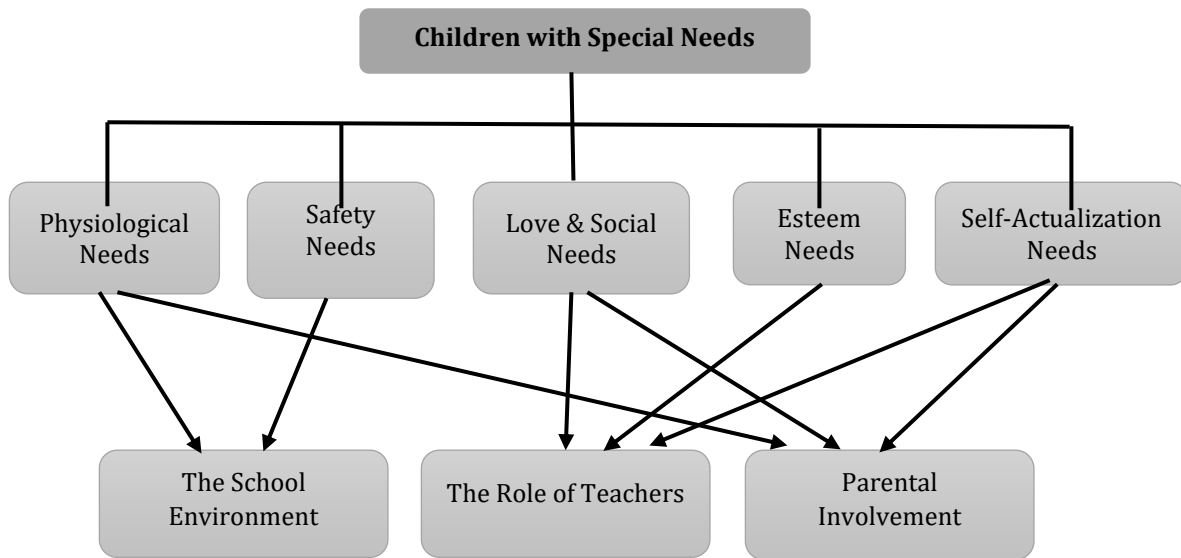
special needs education, especially for children with autism is to ensure the fulfillment of their basic needs, which encompass physiological needs, safety, love and belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization, according to Abraham Maslow's theory. Meeting these needs becomes a fundamental foundation in the learning process and in supporting children's overall growth and development. In this context, it is essential to understand how well such basic needs are met in a concrete educational setting.

## **2. Methods of Implementation**

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. A qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to understand the experiences, interactions, and social dynamics related to fulfilling the basic needs of children with Autism at SLB Negeri 1 Makassar. Qualitative research enables researchers to interpret participants' perspectives within their natural setting, emphasizing meaning, context, and social processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The case study method was utilized to provide an in-depth description of the situation experienced in the school and the factors influencing the fulfillment of the basic needs of children with Autism. A single-case design allows researchers to comprehensively explore the realities within a specific setting and uncover multiple dimensions of the case in detail (Yin, 2018). In this study, the case study approach enabled an exploration of the fulfillment of basic needs, including physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization within the school context.

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, ensuring sensitivity to contextual nuances and participant perspectives (Sugiyono, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The use of a case study design allowed the researcher to examine real conditions in the field and interpret the experiences of children, teachers, and parents concerning the fulfillment of essential needs for children with Autism.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on an adaptation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and emphasizes three major relational components influencing basic needs: (a) the school environment, (b) the role of teachers, and (c) parental involvement.

The fulfillment of basic needs among children with Autism is strongly shaped by the interplay between the school environment, teachers, and parental roles. The school environment contributes fundamentally to meeting physiological and safety needs. A supportive school setting ensures access to nutritional support, clean air, physical comfort, and opportunities for rest, needs that form the basis of children's development according to Maslow's hierarchy. Furthermore, structured routines, adequate supervision, and protective behavioral strategies create a safe and predictable atmosphere that minimizes threats and promotes emotional and physical security essential for adaptive learning.

Teachers play a central role in meeting higher-order needs, including love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Through empathy, personalized attention, and opportunities for social interaction, teachers foster a classroom climate where children feel accepted and emotionally connected. By offering praise, recognition, and constructive reinforcement, teachers strengthen students' self-esteem and sense of competence. In addition, teachers facilitate self-actualization by promoting independence, creativity, and

exploration of individual strengths, enabling children to work toward realizing their full developmental potential.

Parental involvement further strengthens the fulfillment of children's needs across multiple domains. Parents ensure the fulfillment of physiological needs by providing nutritious food, health care, and stable living conditions. At the social-emotional level, parental affection, communication, and warmth nurture children's sense of acceptance and belonging, reducing the risk of emotional withdrawal and low self-worth. Parents also play a crucial role in supporting self-actualization by encouraging autonomy, respecting children's interests, and recognizing their talents laying the foundation for long-term personal growth and goal achievement.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1 Result**

Using the framework of Abraham H. Maslow's hierarchy of needs which identifies five levels of human needs: physiological, safety, belongingness/love, esteem, and self-actualization, the data from observations, interviews (teachers, school principal, and parents), and school documentation reveal that SLB Negeri 1 Makassar has implemented extensive measures to address all levels of needs for children with autism.

- a. **Physiological Needs:** The school consistently ensures basic needs such as nutrition, rest, hygiene, and health. Teachers accompany students during mealtime, adhere to scheduled rest periods, and the school collaborates with public-health centers and local institutions for periodic general and dental health check-ups.
- b. **Safety Needs:** Recognizing the sensitivity of children with autism to environmental or routine changes, the school provides a stable and structured classroom environment. Daily schedules are carefully organized and communicated using visual aids and verbal routines; school regulations protect students from bullying or violence; all stakeholders are committed to safeguarding the children's well-being.
- c. **Belongingness / Love & Social Needs:** The school prioritizes social inclusion and emotional belonging. Teachers arrange gradual social interactions, and extra-curricular or school-wide activities (student-council, arts, games, competitions) are used to foster

social participation, interaction, and a sense of acceptance among peers. These efforts contribute to secure emotional attachment and social belonging.

- d. **Esteem Needs:** Rather than relying on material rewards, the school emphasizes non-material reinforcement: verbal praise, positive feedback, smiles, and affectionate acknowledgement. According to teachers, these forms of recognition are meaningful and help build self-esteem and motivation among students with autism.
- e. **Self-Actualization Needs:** SLB Negeri 1 Makassar offers life-skills and talent-development programs, such as batik-making, music, culinary arts, and visual arts based on an initial assessment of each child's interests and strengths.



**Figure 2.** Creating recycled product designs by the students of SLB Negeri 1 Makassar

These activities aim not only to build vocational or creative skills but to empower students as individuals with unique potential and provide a pathway toward self-actualization. Furthermore, the collaboration between teachers and parents emerged as fundamental. Teachers function not only as educators, but also as facilitators of emotional, social, and life-skills development. Parents reinforce routines and skills at home, ensuring consistency between home and school environments. The school's adaptive curriculum (life skills, ADL training, vocational skills), supportive facilities (counseling, skills rooms), and emotionally supportive classroom atmosphere (verbal encouragement, periodic "ice-breaking," stable routines) contribute to a holistic, child-centered, inclusive environment.

However, structural and relational challenges remain. The school still faces limitations in specialized staff trained for autism, lacks some therapeutic and sensory-support facilities, and experiences variability in parental involvement, factors that hinder optimal fulfillment of all needs in some cases.

## **3.2 Discussion**

### **3.2.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The findings of this study reinforce the relevance of Maslow's hierarchy of needs as an organizing framework for understanding and supporting the multidimensional needs of children with autism. The results indicate that fulfilling physiological and safety needs is foundational: only when children experience stable health, sufficient rest, adequate nutrition, and predictable routines are they able to meaningfully engage in higher-level developmental domains, including social interaction, self-esteem, and self-actualization. This pattern is consistent with literature in educational psychology showing that students' well-being and engagement increase when basic needs are met (Mohamed, 2025; Gultom, 2025).

In this context, the structured implementation of the Activity Daily Living (ADL) program represents a key mechanism for supporting both physiological and safety needs. Through routine activities such as independent eating, personal hygiene, dressing, and organizing learning tools, children develop bodily regulation, environmental predictability, and emotional stability, establishing a developmental foundation for subsequent learning. These findings align with the work of Putri (2023) and Utari and Indiyana (2021), who highlight that consistent ADL training significantly contributes to independence formation and emotional regulation among children on the autism spectrum.

Beyond basic survival needs, the fulfillment of social belonging and esteem needs at school through inclusive peer interactions, emotionally supportive teacher-student relationships, and non-material reinforcement, further strengthens children's engagement and psychosocial adjustment. This is consistent with research showing that emotional support, social acceptance, and a safe relational climate play a critical role in determining the quality of life and psychosocial well-being of children with neurodevelopmental disorders (Materula et al., 2024).

Finally, the opportunities created for self-actualization through talent and life-skills development programs demonstrate the importance of extending educational provision beyond physical and emotional survival toward nurturing personal autonomy, self-worth, and the realization of individual potential. This approach reflects contemporary inclusive-education perspectives, which advocate holistic support for children with autism rather than a narrow focus on academic proficiency alone (Holmes et al., 2022; Mutua, 2022).

### **3.2.2 Challenges and Limitations**

Despite these positive practices, structural limitations such as inadequate specialized staff and sensory-support facilities remain a barrier, a situation commonly reported in special education for children with neurodevelopmental disorders (Materula et al., 2024). Moreover, inconsistent parental involvement and difficulties in replicating structured school-based routines at home pose challenges, especially for sustaining behavioral and ADL (Activity Daily Living) interventions beyond the school environment (Patterson, 2024).

These findings suggest that while a needs-based, holistic approach in special education can significantly support children with autism, its effectiveness depends on resources (trained personnel, facilities), and the collaboration and consistency across home and school environments.

### **3.2.3 Contribution to Knowledge and Implications**

This study contributes empirical evidence showing that fulfilling the full spectrum of Maslow's needs for children with autism is feasible and beneficial in a real-world special-education setting. It underscores the importance of integrating health, emotional, social, and vocational supports, not just academic instruction in education programs for autistic children. For practice, the results suggest that special-needs schools should:

- Prioritize holistic needs assessment and address all levels of needs, starting from physiological and safety.
- Foster strong collaboration with parents to maintain consistency between school and home routines.

- Provide non-material reinforcement and inclusive social opportunities to meet belongingness and esteem needs.
- Offer life-skills and talent-based programs to support self-actualization and independence.

For policy and management, the findings highlight the need to allocate resources for therapy, sensory-support facilities, and specialized staff training to improve long-term outcomes and quality of life for children with autism.

#### 4. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the fulfillment of basic needs for children with autism at SLB Negeri 1 Makassar has been carried out comprehensively and progressively, encompassing physiological needs, safety, social belonging, esteem, and self-actualization in alignment with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The roles of teachers and parents were found to be crucial, with teachers acting as facilitators in the school environment and parents reinforcing routines and fundamental skills at home. This emotional involvement and consistency between two microsystems create a positive synergy for child development, reflecting principles from Bowlby's Attachment Theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological model.

Several strategies contribute to the fulfillment of these needs, including individualized learning approaches, behavioral interventions, ADL (Activity of Daily Living) training, and vocational programs, supported by consistent communication and parental involvement. Despite challenges such as limited specialized educators, inadequate therapeutic facilities, and variation in instructional methods, collaborative efforts among teachers, school leaders, and parents remain a central strength in addressing these barriers.

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