CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter states the conclusion and the implications of the research. Some recommendations are given based on the findings to facilitate the teaching and learning process of autistic children in general.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The analysis of the findings show that the ABA programme has helped the children with autism improve their communication skills. However, some students (Students B,C, D,F,and H) showed more improvement than the others (Students A,E,G,I,J). This difference was due to various reasons such as position of the student in the autism continuum (mild, moderate or severe), age when exposed to intervention programme and duration of treatment per day.

Students who started the intervention programme at a younger age acquired the skills more easily than the older ones. Students who received intensive treatment at home and in school every day performed better than those who received treatment in school only.

The study also showed that some skills were easier to acquire than others. Skills such as Requests, Motor Imitation, Matching to Sample, Receptive, Letters and Numbers and Greeting were easier to acquire but skills such as Cooperative with Adults, Vocal Play, Vocal Imitation, Labelling, Receptive by Function, Feature and Class, Conversational Skills, Social Interaction and Gestures were more difficult to acquire.

Besides this, the study also identifies the problems faced by the teachers and students during the teaching and learning process, the main problem being lack of trained
teachers. The centre has twenty-nine students and nine teachers. Three of the teachers are trained; two are undergoing in service training; the remaining four carry out the lessons prepared by the trained teachers. The centre could not meet the ideal teacher student ratio of 1:1, instead the ratio at this centre is 1:4 or 1:5 which is not conducive for effective intervention. Moreover, the centre is too small to conduct communication activities such as role-playing and simulation activities. Despite these problems, the teachers have been successful in using the ABA programme to teach communication skills to children with autism.

5.3 IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

The findings prove that children with autism can be taught to communicate. As stated by Tiegerman (1993) to say that children with autism cannot communicate is a self-fulfilling prophesy. It is the responsibility of those around them to look at the context in order to understand what the autistic child is trying to communicate (see 2.6). Even students whose intervention programme was short and irregular, have shown some improvement. So, students who receive regular and intensive treatment in ABA are bound to show a lot of improvement like Students B, C, D, F and H in this study. If children with autism in foreign countries can go to college and even obtain a doctorate degree, children in Malaysia can at least learn to be independent. This can only be achieved through hard work and a positive attitude which should be present in parents of autistic children, siblings and their teachers

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Emphasis should be given to teaching these children communication skills and self-help skills so that they can be assimilated into the society as smoothly as possible. In order to do this, the children should be exposed to real life situations such as crossing the
road, taking a bus, buying things from a shop and attending to their personal needs such as toilet training, bathing, dressing and preparing easy meals so that they can become independent.

In order to make the above possible, the centre should employ more teachers, improve the facilities, get a van to transport the children to places such as the swimming pool and the cooperation of the neighbourhood where the centre is situated. Shopkeepers should be enlisted to help when activities such as buying and selling are practised. Some bus drivers should be roped in to help teach the children to take a bus to specific destinations such as from their home to the centre. As stated by Eric Schopler (1980) proponent of the TEACCH Method another programme used to teach children with autism in the other parts of the world, students must see a need to communicate in order to communicate. Students should be able to apply what they have learnt in real life situations. Moreover, the practice should be repeated many times so that it becomes a learned skill.

Since it is a known fact that autistic children shy away from people, isolating autistic children from other normal or handicapped children at all times will not encourage communication. Kindergartens and school should allow these children to participate in certain activities such as physical education and art classes where normal children can interact with the autistic children. This method of teaching autistic children, called 'Shadowing' has been tried and is found to be successful in Australia (Mason, S., 2000). A teacher aid called a 'Shadow' accompanies the child to the normal schools. She helps the child assimilate into the activities carried out by the normal children. She reduces her help gradually as the child becomes more independent and the other children learn to interact with him and include him in their activities.

Teachers at schools for autistic children should be equipped with knowledge of augmentative communication. For instance, if a child is mute, it can be
taught to communicate using sign language, picture pointing and exchange systems, computer generated speech and independent writing, typing or printing to words. Teachers must be at a liberty to choose the most appropriate form of communication after discussion with the parents.

The success of the programme and the student depends on the parents. Teachers at the centre see the student for five and half hours, five days a week. The rest of the time, the child is with the parents or caretakers. The children with autism who participated in the experiment conducted by Lovaas (1977) (see 2.8) were able to attend college eventually because they were exposed to intensive treatment. If the parents participate actively in the programme, their children would achieve great success. In order to help the child at home, parents must know the programme, they must know what the teacher is teaching their child at the centre so that they can teach their child at home.

The government should also take an active interest in autistic children. More training centres should be set up to train people who are interested in teaching autistic children. The authorities should also look into the remuneration system of the teachers. Insufficient salary is one of the main reasons that people do not want to take up this profession. Lack of funds and manpower are two reasons why there are so few centres for children with autism in Malaysia. The government should look into these problems so that Malaysian children with autism can benefit from any educational programme.