

# How Do Regular Students in Inclusive Primary Schools Interpret the Term of 'Students with Special Needs'?

<sup>1\*</sup>Ossy Firstanti Wardany

Special Needs Education Department, Universitas of Muhammadiyah Lampung, Bandar Lampung, Indonesia

**Abstract** A positive perception toward the student with special needs required to build positive attitudes and behaviours in inclusive schools. The aim of this study is to determine the perception of regular students in inclusive primary schools toward students with special needs. This study is a survey and the participants are 146 regular students in inclusive primary school. The study used questionnaires. The results show that only 35% of regular students who know and can interpret the definition of the student with special needs into the text. Most students interpret based on what they see, such as a physical problem, low academic achievement or help by shadow teacher. There are still misconceptions, stereotypes, and negative perception toward students with special needs. It suggests for the teachers in inclusive school for increase disability awareness to overcome the negative perception.

**Keywords:** inclusive school, perception, student with special needs, disability, knowledge

## 1. Research background

Indonesia is a country that supports inclusive education. This is stated in the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 70 of 2009 on the implementation of inclusive education. Based on the rules, children with special needs can attend school in inclusive schools. Inclusion refers to the placement of children in regular education classrooms (Coleman & Olthouse, 2009). Inclusive education allows student with special needs have a right to access the same opportunities, including the same daily experiences and routines, as persons without special needs (McLaughlin, 2006).

Each year, the number of inclusive schools continues to grow. Inclusive education accommodates diversity and provides many benefits. Inclusive education can build respect for diversity and promote positive social

behaviour (Petrescu, 2013). Inclusive can increased social interactions between students with and without disabilities (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006). Students with special needs can have higher academic achiever in inclusive school than special school (Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010; Cole, Waldron, Majd, 2004 & Cushing & Kennedy, 1997). For regular students, inclusion can increase acceptance, tolerance, understanding and greater awareness (Salend & Duhaney, 1999).

Inclusive education has many benefits, but also has many challenges too. The existence of students with special needs in inclusive schools sometimes leads to behavioural problems. Tarnoto (2016) stated that 14.71% of problems with inclusive education are problems between regular students and students with special needs. Kostan & Irwanto (2017) found that many students with special needs bullied by their peer (regular students). Low acceptance from regular students can make students with special needs decreased their learning achievement (Jan & Husain, 2015), down their level of confidence (Fullchange &

\* Corresponding author: Ossy Firstanti Wardany

Email: [ossyfirstan@gmail.com](mailto:ossyfirstan@gmail.com)

Published online at <http://IJDS.ub.ac.id>

Copyright © 2020 Author(s) Licensed under CC BY-NC.

Furlong, 2016) and arise some mental health problem (Rivers, Noret, Poteat & Ashurst, 2009).

Bullying and peer rejected can be caused by negative perspective or a stigma. Most of regular students in Junior High School in Jakarta, Indonesia represented that children with special need were socially represented as individuals who are "lacking of abilities", "difficult to communicate" or "stupid" (Kostan & Irwanto, 2017). Based on the research from Dulisanti (2015) it is known that many regular students give a negative stigma to students with special needs (such as inhibiting, poor in academic achievement and less sociable).

Peer acceptance to students with special needs can be affected by perception, knowledge and experience about disability (Mc Gail & Rieger, 2013). Febriana (2013) stated that attitude and perception toward people with special needs are be affected by the previous encounter with them and other factors (environment, situation, awareness, and experience). A positive perception of the student with special needs required to build positive attitudes and behaviours.

The study aims to determine the perception of regular students in inclusive primary schools toward students with special needs. This study investigates whether there are misconceptions and stereotypical view from regular students toward students with special needs. So, the specific research questions are as follows 1) are the regular students know the term 'students with special needs'? 2) How do the regular students interpret 'students with special needs'?

## 2. Research Methodology

Participants in this study were 146 students of grade 4 and 5 (9-11 years). The participants consisting of 77 girls and 69 boys. The place of study is three inclusive primary schools in Surakarta, Indonesia.

The study used a questionnaire consisting of two questions. The first question is, "Do you know the meaning of students with special needs / children with disabilities?" And the second question is, "If you know the meaning of children with special needs, write a

definition based on your opinion. The answers from the students then grouped and analyzed by qualitative descriptive.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The results showed that 51 regular students said they knew the meaning of student with special needs, while 95 students said that they did not know about that. From those results, only 35% of students can define student with special needs based on their knowledge, perspective, and experience. As many as 65% of students admit they do not know and cannot write the definition of student with special needs. This shows that most of the regular students have less knowledge and low experience about students with special needs. Because of knowledge and experience can form a good perception and great understanding about something.

Totally 146 students, only 51 students have been able to write the definition of 'students with special needs' based on their interpretation. The answers are varied and interesting. Most of the students interpret the meaning of 'students with special needs' based on what they see in their life, both at school and at home their environment.

Fourteen regular students (27%) said that students with special needs as a child who are physically disabled, physically different or have physical problems. The regular students interpreting students with special needs as a child who look different from other children or have physical problems. The following are examples of answers that define students with special needs based on their physique.

"In my opinion, children with special needs are children who have a deficiency. Like, a child who is blind, or cannot speak or hard of hearing."  
(Nabila)

"Children with special needs are children who cannot do anything, like cannot see, cannot hear and cannot walk."  
(Andin)

Furthermore, as many as ten students (20%) interpret students with special needs as disabled, imperfect, different, idiot and autistic

children. This shown that some students still have negative views toward students with special needs. The following are examples below:

"Yes I know! Student with special needs is an idiot child or an autistic child." (Hani)

"An imperfect child or disable child." (Afigo)

"Children with special needs are children who given the shortage by God." (Lutfi)

"Children with some problem, they are different from other normal children." (Galang)

Then, seven regular students (14%) interpret the students with special needs as the students who have problems in learning in their classroom. Found that some children use the word 'stupid' and have a negative perception. Here's an example of student answers:

"Children with special needs are children who have difficulty in learning. Sometimes they do not want to do their task and they are not fluent when reading." (Srikandi)

"A child who cannot think and stupid, a child who does not know how to count and cannot read." (Milan)

Some students also define the term of the student with special need from how a student with special needs learning in the classroom. Eight students (16%) said that children with special needs are children who aided special teachers/shadow teachers when they are studying in the classroom.

"Children with special needs are children who need shadow teacher in class." (Andika)

"A child who needs a shadow teacher in the class." (Nathania)

Furthermore, six regular students (12%) stated that children with special needs are children who need extra guidance in learning.

"Children with special needs are children who need more help and more attention when studying." (Dheryan)

"Children who are hard to learn alone, so they need to be helped by shadow teachers at school." (Alya).

A total of three regular students (6%) describe the students with special needs not only limited to physical or learning difficulties. There are students who interpret students with special needs as children who have problems of various aspects of developmental. An example is the following definition.

"Children with special needs are children who have physical, emotional, intellectual, or behavioural problems." (Mufida)

In addition, there are two regular students who not only define the crew, but also show their attitude. In this case, students show positive perceptions and positive attitudes.

"Children with special needs are children who have problems when they are born and we should not tease them." (Naufal.)

"Children with special needs are children who have a problem and not like us, and we should be grateful because we born normal." (Rafael).

There is one regular student who describes the student with special needs as the same individual as other people. In this case, students assume that every human being is equal.

"I think a child with special needs is a child who wants to be like other children. They want to be able to read, play, and trying to be an independent child like us." (Raihan)

There are a wide variety of interpretations from regular students about the definition of a student with special needs. Based on the answers, it is known that most of the students define student with special needs based only on what they see and their

experience. Thus, most of the students assume that students with special needs are only students who have physical problems. However, there are interesting things. There are some students who define that students with special needs are students who, accompanied by a shadow teacher in the classroom.

The results shown that there were still many students who have negative perceptions, such as defining that students with special needs are children who cannot do anything, as well as calling the word 'stupid', and 'idiot' in their definition. In addition, found some misconceptions, like some students that consider students with special needs only a child with the physical problem or learning problem. This is shown that students have less knowledge about the concept or meaning of student with special needs. However, there are some students who define student with special needs not only from physical and learning problems, but also emotions and behaviour. In addition, there are some students who have positive views and assume that student with special needs just like other human beings.

of 146 students knew and could write the definition of a student with special needs. Only 35% of students who can interpret the definition of a student with special needs according to them indicate that 'student with special needs' is still unfamiliar to them. It is shown that regular students have less knowledge and lack understanding of the student with special needs.

Students interpret students with special needs as they see, such as children who look different or have low academic achievement in the classroom. The results show that there are still misconceptions, such as assuming that students with special needs only those who wear wheelchairs or cannot hear. This is not different with previous research from Louari (2013) which states that many regular students have low comprehension and misconceptions to the student with special needs. Louari said that most of the students tend to associate disability with technical devices (wheelchair, hearing aid, glasses, etc).

The results also indicate prejudice, such as the statements that student with special

needs can not be anything, idiot or stupid. This is not much different from the research result of Konstan & Irwanto (2017) towards junior high school students in Jakarta who stated that regular student represent children with disabilities as individuals who are "lacking of abilities", "difficult to communicate", "stupid".

Inclusive education aims to accept all the diversity of each individual. Therefore, high disability awareness is required to build friendships, peer acceptance, and sense of belonging. Perception relates to how someone views something, and it affects to how their thinking and doing. Through a positive perception then a child will behave well.

Louari & Paparousi (2009) said that contact does not always have a positive impact on students attitudes because some students do not want to have friends with disabilities. Contact without knowledge and understanding of disabilities can lead to a negative attitude. In fact, Attitudes of peers relate to the social participation of students with disabilities. (de Boer, Pijl, Minnaert, 2012). Boer et al stated that negative attitudes may result in low acceptance by peers, few friendships, loneliness and even being rejected and / or bullied student with special needs.

Thus, there is need for intervention to increase acceptance of student with special need. Such as, reading books about disability (Williamson, 2014), using movies or videos (Salend, 2011) field study (Getskow & Konczal, 1996), and so on.

## 4. Conclusion

Only 35% of regular students know the term 'student with special needs' and can write the definition according to them. The results show that regular students have less knowledge and understanding about student with special needs. Results showed 27% of regular students defined students with special needs as children with physical problems, 20% as a disabled or idiot child, 14% as students who had problems in learning, 16% as a child who aided shadow teacher, 12% as a child who need extra guidance in classroom, 6% as a child with physic, developmental, emotional, intellectual or behavior problem, 4% show their positive attitude in their interpretation, and 1% said the

student with special needs as the same individual as other people.

Most of the regular students still represent 'student with special needs' based on what they see, so that misconceptions, stereotypes, prejudices and negative perceptions arise. However, there are some regular students who exhibit a positive attitude when defining student with special needs. This misconception and negative representations are needed to be overcome by providing knowledge and understanding about disability. So we suggest to teachers in inclusive schools to increase disability awareness in regular students with various activities.

## References

- Cole, C. M., Waldron, N., & Majd, M. (2004). Academic progress of students across inclusive and traditional settings. *Mental Retardation*, 42(2), 136-144.
- Coleman, L. & Olthouse, J. (2009). Inclusion. In B. Kerr (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of giftedness, creativity, and talent* (pp. 449-451). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd
- Cushing, L. S., & Kennedy, C. H. (1997). Academic effects of providing peer support in general education classrooms on students without disabilities. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 30(1), 139-151.
- de Boer, A., Pijl, S. J., & Minnaert, A. (2012). Students' attitudes towards peers with disabilities: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 59(4), 379-392.
- DeSimone, J. R., & Parmar, R. S. (2006). Middle school mathematics teachers' beliefs about inclusion of students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 21(2), 98-110.
- Dessemontet, R. S., Bless, G., & Morin, D. (2012). Effects of inclusion on the academic achievement and adaptive behaviour of children with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 56(6), 579-587.
- Dulisanti, R. (2015). Penerimaan sosial dalam proses pendidikan inklusif (studi kasus pada proses pendidikan inklusif di smk negeri 2 malang). *INDONESIAN JOURNAL OF DISABILITY STUDIES (IJDS)*, 2(1).
- Febriana, D. (2013). Students Attitudes and Perceptions Towards People with Disability. *Idea Nursing Journal*. Vol 4(2). 62-67
- Fullchange, A. & Furlong, M.J. (2016). An Exploration of Effects of Bullying Victimization from a Complete Mental Health Perspective. *Sage Open*, Vol 6(1), 1—12.
- Getskow, V. & Konczal, D. (1996). *Kids with Special Needs: Information and activities to promote awareness and understanding*. California: The Learning Works.
- Jan, A. & Husain, S. (2015). Bullying in Elementary Schools: Its Causes and Effects on Students. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6 (19), 43—56.
- Kostan, H. & Irwanto. (2017) Representasi Sosial Mengenai Siswa dengan Disabilitas pada Siswa Non- Disabilitas SMP Inklusi di DKI Jakarta. *Indonesian Journal of Disability Studies (IJDS)* Vol. 04(02), pp153-164.
- Kurth, J. A., & Mastergeorge, A. M. (2010). Academic and cognitive profiles of students with autism: Implications for classroom practice and placement. *International Journal of Special Education*, 25(2), 8-14.
- Loauri, M. (2013). Can typical students define the word “disability”? A pilot study about their knowledge or misconceptions. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 93 699 – 703
- Louari, M., Paparousi, M. (2009). Do children with disabilities have friends? In Ines Gomes, Rui Leonardo Maia (Eds): *“Special Education: From Theory to Practice”* (pp. 513-520). Praga-Portugal: Universidade Fernando Pessoa editions

- McGail ,E. & Rieger, A. (2013). Increasing Disability Awareness through Comics Literature. *Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education*, 3(1), 1—20
- McLaughlin, M. (2006). Inclusive education. In G. L. Albrecht (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of disability* (Vol. 1, pp. 929-930). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd
- Petrescu, C. (2013). INCLUSIVE EDUCATION. *Euromentor Journal*, 4(2), 149-152.
- Rivers, I., Noret, N., Poteat, V.P. & Ashurst, N. (2009). Observing Bullying at School: The Mental Health Implications of Witness Status. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 24(4), 211—223.
- Salend, S.J. (2011) *Creating Inclusive Classrooms 7<sup>th</sup> edition: Effective and Reflective Practices*. New York: Pearson
- Salend, S.J. & Duhaney, L.M.G (1999). The Impact of Inclusion on Students With and Without Disabilities and Their Educators. *Remedial and Special Education* Vol 20(2). 114-radioaktivitas
- Tarnoto, N. (2016) Permasalahan-Permasalahan Yang Dihadapi Sekolah Penyelenggara Pendidikan Inklusi Pada Tingkat SD. *Humanitas* 13(1), 50—61
- Williamson, C. (2014). *Effects of Disability Awareness Educational Programs on an Inclusive Classroom Honors Projects*. Paper 134.