

Teacher Perception Towards Empowerment of Students with Special Needs in the Learning Process

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ABSTRACT

Children with special needs (ABK) are children who have special characteristics and are different from children as usual, in other words they are not able to show mental, emotional or physical disabilities, which are included in the category of children with special needs including: blind, deaf, mentally retarded, physically disabled, mentally retarded, learning difficulties, and behavioral difficulties. Barriers to the education of children with special needs require the form of educational services that are in accordance with their abilities and potential. The purpose of this study was to examine the description of the perception and role of teachers on the learning of children with special needs. This research method uses descriptive qualitative. This research was conducted in school TK ABA KALAKA. The result of this study is that in general, teachers perceive children with special needs as requiring intensive learning. Children with special needs need continuous guidance between teachers and parents. In order to improve the readiness of classroom teachers in dealing with children with special needs and provide a shadow teacher to facilitate children with special needs. The teacher as a teacher in his role also focuses on training the independence of children because children with special needs cannot always depend on others but at least children with special needs can take care of themselves

INTRODUCTION

Children with special needs have different characteristics from children in general, both in terms of physical, mental, and social behavior. These differences can be advantages or disadvantages, and have their own impact on the individual. Heward explains that children with special needs have uniqueness that distinguishes them from other children, without always leading to mental, emotional, or physical disabilities. (Saputri et al., 2023).

Children with special needs are defined as children who require special education and services to optimize the development of their human potential. The term "children with special needs" is used because these children need support in meeting their life needs, including educational services, social services, guidance and counseling, and various other types of special services. (Ayuning et al., 2022)

(Hidayah et al., 2021a) It is said that teachers play an important role in making changes, so commitment and knowledge are needed to improve the quality of learning in inclusive schools. Inclusive education is a challenge for educators, especially teachers, to create changes in the education system in order to better meet the needs of students.

Perception has a major impact on a person's performance in their profession, for example a teacher. If a teacher has a bad perception of their students, the learning process can be hampered. Therefore, special adjustments are needed to make learning more effective and efficient. In addition, the teacher's ability to manage learning and the availability of adequate facilities and infrastructure are also crucial for the smooth running of teaching and learning activities. (Farah Arrian Agustiyawat Alifia Rizki Ranti Widiyanti Slamet Wibowo Christina Tulalessy Fera Herawati Theresia Maryant, 2022).

All children have the right to receive education without exception. The Republic of Indonesia has regulated the rights and obligations of its citizens to receive education in the 1945 Constitution, Article 31. Included in this regulation are all citizens, including children with special needs (ABK). The awareness of the world community regarding the importance of providing educational services without discrimination has finally given birth to a very brilliant idea with the birth of inclusive education. Inclusive education provides opportunities for children with special needs to attend school together with other children (Lieung et al., 2021) (Permendiknas No. 70 OF 2009, 2009). Inclusive schools aim to provide educational services for children with special needs in regular schools, and this is expected to have a positive impact on children's psychology (Lieung et al., 2021). This policy is considered very appropriate because in community life, children with special needs and children without special needs must be able to live together harmoniously. (Lieung et al., 2021).

In general, children with special needs (ABK) are often associated with groups of people with disabilities. Many people assume that children with special needs always refer to children who have certain limitations, both in physical and mental aspects. (Lieung et al., 2021).

More broadly, children with special needs are not always limited to children with disabilities or disabilities. There are various types of ABK who actually show extraordinary potential, such as gifted and exceptionally intelligent children, who are also included in this category. (Lieung et al., 2021). Thus, children with special needs have a fairly broad understanding. ABK covers various types of categories. Some commonly known classifications include blind, deaf, mentally retarded, physically disabled, emotionally disabled, autism, and multiple disabilities. (Lieung et al., 2021).

Children with ABK (children with special needs) who are not detected early often attend regular schools. Therefore, teachers in regular schools need to have adequate preparation and competence to provide appropriate services to ABK. Teachers must have sufficient understanding and knowledge about ABK in order to be able to provide optimal services (Lieung et al., 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Children with Special Needs (ABK) are children who experience differences or obstacles in physical, intellectual, emotional, social, or sensory aspects compared to children in general. They require special education, care, and support services to be able to develop properly. In this study, there are several theories that form the basis for understanding the characteristics of ABK and methods of handling them.

Cognitive theory suggests that the ability to think and understand information can develop over time. Various factors that influence this development include genetic factors, environment (such as education and social interaction), nutrition, physical and mental health, and childhood experiences. All of these factors interact in a complex way to shape an individual's cognitive development. (Barokah et al., 2024).

Social emotional development theory (Harianja et al., 2023) It is explained that children's social emotional development is the process by which children learn about themselves, relationships with others, and how to manage and respond to their feelings and emotions. This is an important part of a child's holistic development, which involves complex interactions between social and emotional aspects. Social emotional development in early childhood includes the child's ability to understand and manage their emotions and interact with others. Speaking is a basic ability of every human being that can be developed through practice (Yabu, Umi Kalsum, N.D.)

According to behaviorism theory, learning is defined as a change in behavior caused by experience. According to (Novi Irwan Nahar, 2016) Learning is the result of the interaction between stimulus (S) and response (R). In this theory, what is important is the input in the form of stimulus and output in the form of response. Behaviorist learning theory is a school of thought that places great emphasis on the need for observable behavior. According to the behaviorist view, learning is basically the formation of associations between stimuli received through the five senses with the tendency to act, or the relationship between stimulus and response. Therefore, this theory is also known as the stimulus-response theory. Learning is defined as an effort to form as many relationships

as possible between stimulus and response. Behaviorism is a school of psychology that focuses more on individual physical phenomena and tends to ignore mental aspects such as intelligence, talent, interests, and feelings in the learning process. Learning events are carried out by training reflexes so that they become habits that are mastered by the individual.

Research on Children with Special Needs (ABK) has been widely conducted in various disciplines, including psychology, education, and health. Relevant previous studies can be used as references in developing this research approach. Students with special needs learn with regular students, but sometimes require additional guidance in the inclusive resource room because they are not yet fully able to adapt to the abilities of their peers in regular classes. According to (Research et al., 2021), Regular schools that implement inclusive education are an effective approach to addressing discrimination, building an inclusive society, creating a friendly environment, and realizing education for all. Schools need to adapt to suit the special needs of students, so that all students can actively participate in the learning process in a friendly and flexible way.

In a study conducted by (Mataram et al., 2024) At PAUD Pondok Anak Pertiwi Depok, the implementation of Individual Learning Plans (RPI) and multisensory approaches proved to be very effective in developing the social and emotional abilities of children with special needs (ABK). This approach allows for more personal and in-depth attention, while increasing children's active participation and understanding.

According to research (Mataram et al., 2024) In an inclusive school, the level of learning motivation of children with special needs (ABK) is generally at a moderate level, although there are differences between low and high levels. The role of teachers is very important in increasing this motivation through giving awards, creating a comfortable classroom atmosphere, and adjusting appropriate learning methods.

(Sopiati et al., 2023) It is explained that the learning process is modified by adjusting the student's learning type. Learning is adapted to suit the abilities of students with special needs. The student-centered approach is used in modifying the learning process, which focuses on the differences in the characteristics of each student. Every human being who is born has basic abilities, namely speaking and understanding stimulation that affects different results (Karmila P. Lamadang, 2020)

According to research (Flobamorata Elementary Education & Sulisty Nugroho, 2021), the Individual Learning Program (PPI) has a positive impact in supporting children's learning processes, because the material taught is adjusted to the abilities and needs of each student. This allows for the development of children's academic aspects to the maximum. Another example of success is one of the special needs students who managed to achieve an achievement by winning a national storytelling competition in 2018.

METHODOLOGY

The type of research applied in this study is a descriptive qualitative method, focusing on "Teachers' Perceptions of Empowering Students with Special Needs in the Learning Process." The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with the criteria for respondents being teachers who teach Children with Special Needs (ABK). From these criteria, three class teachers were obtained as research subjects. An overview of the perceptions and roles of teachers in learning children with special needs was collected through questions arranged based on aspects of teacher perceptions and roles. This research was conducted on February 12-22, 2025. Data collection was carried out through interviews, observations, and documentation.

Descriptive qualitative research aims to explain, present, and analyze perceptions, influencing factors, understanding, experiences related to a phenomenon, beliefs, and views. (Jannah & Rasyid, 2023). This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to deeply understand teachers' perceptions of empowering students with special needs in learning. The research participants were teachers who teach in inclusive schools or Aisyiyah Busthanul Athfal Kindergarten (TK ABA Kalaka), who were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on their experience in teaching students with special needs. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with semi-structured guidelines, observations in the school environment, and document analysis related to policies and practices for empowering students with special needs. Thematic analysis techniques were used to identify main patterns and themes in the data obtained, including transcription, coding, categorization, and interpretation of findings.

In order to ensure the credibility and reliability of the data, triangulation of sources and methods was carried out, namely by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documents. Data reliability was also maintained through member checking, where the interview results were reconfirmed to participants to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation. This research model focuses on exploring teachers' perceptions of empowering students with special needs, considering factors such as teaching experience, school support, and inclusive education policies. Through this design, the study is expected to provide a deep understanding of teachers' perceptions of empowering students with special needs in learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students with special needs are students who experience various obstacles in their development and academics, so they require special education and services during the learning process (Sunarti & Mardianti, 2024). Students with special needs are students who face various challenges in their development and academics, so they require special education and services in their learning process (Sunarti & Mardianti, 2024). Children with special needs are children who experience disorders in growth and development, both physically, mentally, and emotionally (Sunarti & Mardianti, 2024).

Children with special needs are children who require special treatment due to developmental disorders and abnormalities. They need special services or treatment in order to achieve optimal development, which is caused by the conditions of the abnormalities or specialties they have (Sunarti & Mardianti, 2024). Children with Special Needs (ABK) have different characteristics from normal children in general. They experience challenges in growth and development, both physically, psychologically, mentally, intellectually, and socially. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), there are 1.6 million children with special needs in Indonesia. of that number, 299 thousand children are registered in inclusive schools, 115 thousand in Special Schools (SLB), while the rest do not get access to education at all (Frans Laka Lazar, 2020): 1).

Based on research at the Aisyiyah Busthanul Athfal Kindergarten (TK ABA Kalaka) and studies that have been conducted, namely, teachers' perceptions of empowering students with special needs in the learning process vary greatly. Some of the main findings from the results of the study using the interview method.

A. Teachers' Understanding of Students with Special Needs

Teachers have an important role in shaping students' attitudes to always respect others, especially those who have differences. To maximize this role, the following steps need to be taken. First, teachers need to have in-depth knowledge and understanding of the importance of an anti-discriminatory attitude towards students with special needs. With a good understanding, teachers are expected to be the main drivers in building students' awareness to avoid discriminatory actions. Second, as agents of change in anti-discrimination awareness, teachers are expected to be able to practice these values directly in and outside the classroom, even outside the school environment. By providing real examples, students with special needs are expected to be able to imitate and apply the same attitudes in community life. Third, teachers should have a high sensitivity to students with special needs, especially in identifying and responding to acts of discrimination related to differences in ability (Author et al., 2023).



Figure 1. Accompaniment of Teachers and Parents of Children with Special Needs

Most teachers have a diverse understanding of the needs and characteristics of students with special needs. Teachers who have received special training tend to have a better understanding and are able to adjust learning methods. However, there are still many teachers who do not have a deep understanding so they have difficulty implementing inclusive learning methods. Law Number 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities mandates the government to provide access to inclusive education and appropriate services for persons with disabilities. In addition, Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 70 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities and Potential Intelligence and/or Special Talents regulates the implementation of inclusive education in schools. This regulation was later revoked and replaced by Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 48 of 2023, which updates the policy related to inclusive education.

Effective implementation of this regulation can shape teachers' positive perceptions of SBK empowerment, encourage them to adopt adaptive and inclusive learning methods, so that a supportive learning environment is created for all students. Teachers' understanding of students with special needs (SBK) is the main key in creating an inclusive and effective learning environment. Teachers who have a deep understanding of the characteristics, needs, and potential of SBK tend to be better able to adjust learning strategies, such as implementing Individual Education Programs (PPI), multisensory methods, and differentiation strategies in teaching. However, many teachers still have difficulty understanding the needs of SBK, especially due to lack of training and supporting resources. Therefore, improving teacher competence through continuous training, support for education policies, and collaboration with experts and parents is an important step to ensure that every SBK gets equal and quality access to education.

B. Teacher Attitudes and Perceptions

Teachers' attitudes towards students with special needs in the classroom have an impact on the social-emotional aspects of these students. Teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusive education are seen as a requirement, support, and main driver for the success of inclusive education (Musyafira & Hendriani, 2021).

The results of the study showed that children's disciplinary behavior improved after the intervention, and hypothesis testing confirmed the positive impact of the application of basic teaching skills by teachers. Teachers need to have effective questioning skills, provide reinforcement to children, and manage the class well to build positive disciplined behavior. In addition, collaboration between teachers and parents is also an important factor in the formation of children's disciplined behavior. Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of basic teaching skills of teachers in supporting the development of disciplined behavior in children. usia dini (Aulia Widya Rahma Ade Fitri Cahyan Hurul Fikriyah Z.B Fidrayan, 2024).



Figure 2. Assistance for Students with Special Needs

Teachers' attitudes towards students with special needs greatly affect the success of the learning process. Teachers who have a positive attitude tend to be more creative in providing adaptive learning and supporting student development. Conversely, teachers who are less confident in teaching students with special needs often face difficulties in providing optimal educational services. In the learning process, teachers' perceptions of empowering students with special needs (SBK) play an important role in creating an inclusive learning environment. Teachers who have a positive view of SBK will be more likely to adopt appropriate learning strategies, such as the Individual Education Program (PPI) approach, multisensory methods, and providing positive reinforcement to increase student confidence and independence. In addition, teachers who are aware of the importance of empowering SBK will be more active in collaborating with parents, experts, and the school community to create a sustainable support system. However, challenges such as limited training, lack of resources, and lack of understanding of the specific needs of SBK are still obstacles to the implementation of effective inclusive education.

C. Teachers' Perceptions of SBK Empowerment

According to research (Hidayah et al., 2021b), teachers play a crucial role in the teaching and learning process of children with special needs (ABK) in the classroom, especially in helping and teaching ABK during learning, as well as facilitating communication between ABK and their friends.



Figure 3. Empowerment of Students with Special Needs

Teachers' perceptions of students with special needs are influenced by various factors, including teaching experience, training received, and school policies. Teachers who have a positive view of empowering students with special needs tend to develop more inclusive learning methods, provide opportunities for children with special needs to actively participate in class, and apply an individual approach to the learning process.

D. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors ***Supporting Factors***



Figure 4. Learning Together with the Assistance of Parents of Children with Special Needs

The facilities provided must be appropriate to the age, abilities, and environment of the child, because this will greatly motivate them in the learning process (Pratiwi et al., 2022).

- Learning Motivation: Students' enthusiasm and desire to learn have a major impact on the success of the learning process.
- Physical Condition and Health: Optimal health supports concentration and activity in the learning process.
- Cognitive Ability: Each student has a different level of understanding, so it requires the right approach.
- Inclusive Learning Method: Teachers need to apply strategies that accommodate the needs of students with special needs.
- Creativity in Teaching: Use of learning media that is interesting and relevant to students' needs.
- Patience and Empathy: Teachers need to have a deep understanding of the conditions of each student.
- The Role of Parents in Learning Assistance: Parental involvement is crucial in supporting children learning at home.
- Providing Motivation and Emotional Support: Psychological support from the family helps children feel valued and increases self-confidence.



Figure 5. Classroom learning

Inhibiting Factors in Learning

Inhibiting factors:

Mwathi (in Diana et al., 2022)) In addition, it should be noted that children with special needs often still require direct assistance and their participation is still limited, both inside and outside the school environment. As a result, they lack access to play and learning materials that are appropriate to their specific needs.

- Inaccessible Technology and Learning Media
- Limited Learning Aids: For example, the lack of Braille books for blind students or special software for students with learning difficulties.
- Fixed on Conventional Methods: Learning that still uses traditional methods without technological innovation can make it difficult for students with special needs to understand the subject matter.
- By recognizing these inhibiting factors, schools, teachers, parents, and the surrounding environment can work together to find solutions to ensure that students with special needs get a more optimal learning experience.

E. Interview Results



Figure 6. Interview with the Class Teacher Accompanying the Child with Special Needs

From the results of the interview with the class teacher, Mrs. Hajira Lainse, it can be concluded that the child named Mujahidah has special needs, namely autism. The teacher uses visual and kinesthetic learning methods and provides extra assistance to the mujahidah for her to do learning and playing activities.



Figure 7. Interview with Parents of Students

From the results of the interview with the parents of Mujahidah's guardian, it was found that her child had special needs since the age of 3 years, the cause of this was that her parents often gave her a cellphone as a play tool, the impact of this was that Mujahidah became dependent on the cellphone to the point of causing problems with her nervous system, and finally the child had a tantrum.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers' perceptions of empowering students with special needs in the learning process greatly determine the success of inclusive education. By providing adequate training, raising awareness of the importance of inclusive education, and providing adequate support, teachers can be better prepared to teach and empower students with special needs. Therefore, there needs to be cooperation between the government, schools, and the community in creating a more inclusive and friendly learning environment for all students.

FURTHER STUDY

Based on the results of the discussion regarding teacher perceptions of empowering students with special needs in the learning process, here are some suggestions that can be applied to improve the effectiveness of inclusive education:

Improving Teacher Competence

- The government and educational institutions need to provide ongoing training for teachers related to inclusive learning methods.
- Teachers should be given the opportunity to attend workshops, seminars, or courses that discuss techniques for teaching students with special needs.

Strengthening Support from Educational Institutions

- Schools must create clear policies regarding inclusive education and provide supporting facilities.
- Principals and education personnel must provide moral and professional support for teachers in facing the challenges of teaching students with special needs.

Collaboration with Parents and Special Education Experts

- Teachers need to build good communication with parents of students with special needs to understand the individual needs of their children.
- Schools can collaborate with psychologists, therapists, and special education experts to support a more effective learning process.

Improving School Facilities and Infrastructure

- The government and schools need to ensure the availability of learning aids that are appropriate to the needs of students with special needs.
- Provision of inclusive-friendly classrooms with supporting facilities such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, and technology-based learning materials.

Mindset Change and Stigma Elimination

- Educational programs for teachers, students, and the community to reduce discrimination and stigma against students with special needs.
- Encourage an empathetic and inclusive approach in the school environment so that all students feel valued and accepted.

Flexible Curriculum Development

- The curriculum must be adaptive and flexible so that it can be adjusted to the needs of students with special needs.
- Teachers need to develop more varied learning strategies, such as project-based approaches, multisensory learning, and individualization methods.

By implementing the suggestions above, it is hoped that inclusive education can run more optimally, so that students with special needs can develop optimally in a supportive learning environment.

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