

EXPLORING SEN STUDENTS' PARENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS INCLUSIVE SCHOOL

Nadya Rezkhita Dwiana¹, Hikmah Zalifah Putri and Nuria Farahdina
Universitas Muhammadiyah, Palembang¹
nadyarezkhitadwiana96@gmail.com; hikmahzalifahputri@yahoo.com;
nuriafarah98@gmail.com

Abstract: The purpose of this research was to find out the perceptions of SEN students' parents towards the inclusive school. The method used in this research was a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The data collection techniques were in depth interview with three SEN students' parents and classroom observation at SMP Negeri 13 Palembang. The results of the research showed that the SEN students' parents have positive perceptions towards inclusive school because they believe that inclusive schools have benefits for their children; (1) improvement of SEN students' social skills, and (2) equal opportunity in education. However, the result from observation showed that there is a challenge to improve their academic skills. Thus, the SEN students' parents need to be more involved in their children's education in the class and outside the class.

Keywords: Inclusive school, SEN students, Parents' perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Having an equal right has been promoted a lot in modern days. People have been fighting over to get equal rights for all kinds of human beings. It also impacts on education system. Having an equal right in education system means that every student should be able to go to school, even for special needs one. Therefore, the government offers a solution by fostering inclusive education to several public schools so that the special education needs students could enroll along with the non-Special Educational Needs (non-SEN) students and feel the education as it should be for non-SEN students; the program is called inclusive school. Inclusive education for SEN students legally also received international protection, namely the existence of the Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), and the United Nations Standard Building on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993). In developing countries, such as Indonesia, inclusive education is applied and regulated by the Ministry of National Education of Republic Indonesia as seen on the Regulation Number 70 year 2009.

The term inclusive education itself could mean the access of students who have disabilities to enroll the general education classroom. This inclusive education is designed to be able to meet the unique learning needs of each student with disabilities (Yazicioglu, 2019 as cited in (Ersoy, 2021)). However, the concept of inclusive schools is not easy to implement, let alone to succeed. The implementation of inclusive school is somehow controversial due to its conflicts and challenges (Rante et al., 2020).

The challenges may come from the teachers in the inclusive school. It is undeniable that teachers play the most crucial role in succeeding the concept of inclusive education especially how the teachers are able to manage the class (Salim et al., 2020). One of the biggest obstacles is the teachers' attitude towards the implementation of inclusive schools. An international interview showed that the majority of teachers have a neutral or negative attitude towards the

implementation of inclusive education. The negative attitude would be caused by how they become accustomed to the general idea of the classroom system, therefore they become reluctant to accept the new education system— the inclusive one (de Boer et al., 2011). Another obstacle could be the teachers' incompetence in managing the classroom consisting both Non-SEN and SEN students (Farahdina, 2021). This challenge faced by the teacher would likely be caused by how each SEN student likely requires different teaching methods in helping them to feel comfortable in teaching and learning process (Sunardi et al., 2011) therefore, it is highly necessary for teachers to have high competence in teaching inclusive class.

Inclusive education also offers several benefits as follows: (1) helping students to gain equal and quality education no matter what their abilities and disabilities are, and (2) developing SEN students' social skills (Allen & Cowdery, 2005 as cited in (Adams et al., 2017)). Inclusive education can play a crucial role in helping SEN students to build their confidence, to interact with others socially and to obtain greater social acceptance (Yasin et al., 2014) because this system was found to be helpful in improving SEN students' social skills through classroom interaction (Agustriyana & Nisa, 2017; Nangle et al., 2010). Having a better social skill could be one of SEN students' parents' motive to place their children into the inclusive school. Some expectations have been risen up towards the system; parents expect their SEN children gaining opportunities to contact with peers in social situations and having better acceptance by locals (de Boer et al., 2010).

In order to achieve those benefits mentioned, there are many factors that could help the success of the implementation of inclusive education; one of which is parents (Wong et al., 2014). The previous study investigating parents' perception towards inclusive education in Lampung, Indonesia found that parents have positive perception towards inclusive education no matter how high, moderate or low educational and socioeconomic status they are (Adiputra et al., 2019). As far as the authors concerned, SEN students' parents' perception towards inclusive education was still largely unexplored, even though parents are the ones who reserved the right to choose to enrol their students to inclusive school (Paseka & Schwab, 2020). Therefore, this study aimed to find out more about parents' perception towards the implementation of inclusive school.

METHOD

Design and procedure

This study used qualitative method with in-depth interview and classroom observation. The data was collected using digitally recorded interviews. The participants were given two main questions then followed up with more questions based on their answer. The questions are adapted from a previous study (Farahdina, 2021). The main questions were: (1) Does inclusive education bring positive or negative impacts towards your child? (2) What are the factors for such an impact? The duration of the interview was between 10-15 minutes. Each question was open ended that gave the participants the opportunity to give long and elaborated answers. The results of the interview, then, were analyzed using thematic analysis by categorizing the data into codes and indicators to find the common theme.

Classroom observation was also done in gathering necessary data. One classroom was observed in which three SEN students presented and the focus of the observation was to see the SEN students' behavior during the teaching and learning process and their interaction with Non-SEN students presenting in the classroom.

Participants

The participants of this study were parents of the SEN students at SMP Negeri 13 Palembang. Three parents chosen for interview were parents whose children had attended elementary inclusive schools, therefore, had more experience with the concept of inclusive

education. The students whose parents were being interviewed were SEN students with down syndrome, ADHD, and autism.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study aimed to investigate parents' perceptions towards inclusive education. Based on the in-depth interview with those parents chosen, the codes, indicators and themes were categorized as follows;

Table 1. The codes, indicators and themes based on the interview

Codes	Indicators	Themes
Positive impact	A. SEN students know social cues	SEN students' social skills improvement
	B. SEN students become more socially aware	
	C. SEN students adapt their peers' social skills through interaction	
	D. SEN students behave well in classroom because of their peers	SEN students mimic Non-SEN students' behavior
	E. SEN students observe and mimic their peers' behaviour	
Negative impact	A. SEN students' academic skills do not improve	The teachers' incompetence and lack of training influenced the SEN students' academic skills.
	B. The teachers are lack of training and competence in teaching in inclusive class	
	C. SEN students are being more depended on their parent	Being more depended on their parent attending in the classroom becomes one of the factors for SEN students' incompetence
	D. SEN students would probably not want to study without their parent/caretaker's attendance in the classroom.	

From the in-depth interview, it was found that the parents have positive perceptions towards inclusive schools because they believe that inclusive schools have benefits for their children. It supported the previous study which found that parents' perceptions towards inclusive education was high (Adiputra et al., 2019). One of the most prominent benefits is the

improvement of their social skills. In the interview, the parents acknowledge how their children are becoming more comfortable in interacting with their classmates. It was in line with the previous study which found that the SEN students' social skills were improved due to the interaction with peers (Yasin et al., 2014). The parents also admitted that their SEN children are getting better in taking social cues. They are having a better social awareness, for instance, they would understand how to behave in the classroom. Knowing how to behave in the classroom might be influenced by how SEN students observe and mimic the Non-SEN students. For instance, it was observed that SEN students would write in their notebook when they saw their friends did too. Arguably, they behave better in the classroom because they mimic their peers' behavior in class. If their friend is quiet and listen to their teacher then the SEN students will also become quiet and listen to their teacher.

Those social skills improvement could be caused by how SEN students meet their peers (Non-SEN students) on a regular daily basis. SEN students' social skills are their skill to adapt with other people socially in class through interaction such as observing their friends, greeting, smiling, and talking with their friends (Agustriyana & Nisa, 2017). Putting SEN students into inclusive school will increase their social interaction which will consequently increase their social skill (Staub, Spaulding, Peck, Gallucci, & Schwartz, as cited in (Nangle et al., 2010).

However, despite having improvement in terms of social skill, the participants agree that the SEN students' academic skills do not improve as much. The lack of training and experience of the teachers contribute to the lack of improvement of the SEN students' academic skill. This finding actually supported the previous study (Farahdina, 2021) which found that the teachers have difficulty in managing the classroom consisting of both Non-SEN and SEN students. Not to mention that each SEN student requires a different teaching approach that can accommodate their individual needs (Sunardi et al., 2011). However, since in one class the teacher is responsible for a lot of students, they do not have the time to adjust their teaching approach to accommodate each SEN student present in their class. One of the participants has agreed that this may contribute to the lack of improvement of the SEN students' academic skill.

Participant 1

"...he needs to be taught until he understands. So, his approach is more logical... he wants to be shown real example to understand. However, in school is not like that, because the teacher is teaching a lot of students"

Another factor contributing to the lack of improvement of the SEN students' academic skill is the dependency of SEN students with their caretaker or their parent who is present in the class. One participant (Participant 3 below) notes that this becomes one of the obstacles for SEN students to concentrate on their study. At SMP Negeri 13, the school requires the parents to attend the class with the students because from previous experience they found it difficult to handle the SEN students without help. However, this create dependency towards their caretaker or parent. The SEN students see their caretaker or parent as part of their learning process. Therefore, changes and inattentiveness of their caretakers may result in the SEN students' refusal to participate in class.

Participant 3

"She only wants me to be with her at school, if not me then she doesn't want to study"

The responsibility of supporting SEN students is supposed to be shared between school and home (Wong et al., 2014). In this case, the role of the caretaker is as important as the teacher. However, some parents or caretaker may not have the resource or support to be able to help with their children's academics. Two of the three participants admitted that they do not

help with their SEN children's academics because they did not expect more from their children. They admit to be satisfied with the improvement of the SEN students' social skill. While the other one was completely involve with their SEN student's academics by reviewing the subjects at home. This parent involvement is reflected in the score which is higher than the other two, this actually supports the previous study (Afolabi, 2014) which found a strong relationship between parents' involvement and SEN students' academic achievement. Indeed, parents' positive perception could lead to the successful inclusive education (Adiputra et al., 2019), however, it still needs SEN students' parents' involvement in their academics.

Although they did not expect much in terms of academic improvement, the parents still agree that enrolling in inclusive school is a good option for their children. Two of the participants were suggested by their paediatrician to enroll their students to inclusive school instead of a Special Need School (*Sekolah Luar Biasa*). The other one decided to enrol because the parent realizes that their child would not improve if they are still in Special Need School.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and the discussion of this study, it can be concluded that the parents' perception towards inclusive school is positive. The parents agree that by enrolling their SEN children in inclusive school, they can develop their social skill well. However, they stated that the academic aspect does not develop as well as their social skill. Despite that, the parents showed support towards the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesian schools.

For parents, it is suggested to be more involve with the SEN students' academics in order to help improve the SEN students' academic skills. Parents should try to find out more about learning approaches that suited the SEN students' learning style. Parents should also team up with teachers to make sure that the SEN students' receive the best from inclusive education. For teachers, it is suggested to get special training in teaching SEN students in order to help the SEN students with their academic skill. For school, it is suggested to held workshop or teacher training in order to accommodate the lack of teachers' competence.

Due to the limited data, there is a lot more room to explore. The positive attitudes of the parents may come from the fact that their own children have disabilities. Therefore, it is highly suggested to find and to compare the perception from Non-SEN students' parents for further research.

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