

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN INCLUSIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This article examines the social participation of students with special educational needs (SEN) in four aspects, namely friendship, interaction, social self-perception and peer acceptance. It also discusses their social participation in an inclusive school. Furthermore, the research descriptively analyses the quantitative relationship among these four aspects of social participation. The data was collected from students with and without SEN in ten inclusive elementary schools located in Padang. The social self-perception was measured in three aspects, namely Self-Perception Profile for Children, Self-Description Questionnaire and Social Acceptance of Peers. The results show that the majority of students with SEN have a satisfying level of social participation. However, when comparing with their peers (regular students), they are more likely to have difficulties in social participation, with fewer friends and less cohesive friendship. Also, they interact more with their teacher and are less accepted by their normal peers whose social self-perception differs. However, there are no significant differences in social participation in both groups.

Keywords: *social participation, students with special educational needs, inclusive school.*

Introduction

Educating children with special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive schools is an important objective of the educational system in Indonesia. It is listed in the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 70 for Year 2009 (Nasional & Indonesia, 2009), which states that inclusive education is an educational system which gives equal opportunity to all SEN students with the intelligence potential to join the education institutions along with those without SEN. It is certainly a breakthrough in educational services for children with SEN by implemented inclusive education and providing the opportunity to

be educated concerning diversity and non-discriminated. The data in the last ten years shows that more parents prefer registering their children with SEN in inclusive schools (Meynert, 2014). They often stated the academic advantages as positive benefits from the placement of their children in inclusive schools (Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012). The main motive why parents register this category of children into the regular school is to allow them to increase their social skills (Harris, Pretti-Frontczak & Brown, 2009).

Various international research prove that these sets of children do not automatically increase the quality of friendship with their peers (students without SEN) (Petrina, Carter & Stephenson, 2014). Students with SEN who are in an elementary inclusive school face the risk of social problems owing to their failure in understanding the social environment and difficulty in interpreting the social initiation of other children (M Marlina, 2017). Some studies found that children who were diagnosed with autistic disorder and those with the behavioural disorder had a problem in building relationships with peers and faced the risk of becoming isolated in classrooms (Kasari, Locke, Gulsrud & Rotheram-Fuller, 2011); (Kasari et al., 2011). Also, children with mild SEN show social discontent higher than that of their peers (students without SEN) (Chung, Carter & Sisco, 2012).

Therefore, some experts assessed the social aspects of inclusive education implementation in three concepts, namely participation, integration and inclusion (Koster, Pijl, Nakken, & Houten, 2010). Over the years, Koster et al. (2010) have been reviewing 62 international published journals to determine the social dimension of inclusive education in elementary schools. The dimensions of social participation in the implementation of inclusive education consist of four aspects, namely friendship, interaction, self-perception and the acceptance of peers. Also, it reveals the social participation among fellow children with SEN in inclusive schools.

Methods

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research approach and was conducted by surveying while giving instructions to students and teachers. The aspects measured by the instrument and the type of instruments utilised by the students are described in Table 1 with that of teachers given in the form of self-report. The data was collected in two rounds, and in each of them two aspects of social participation were assessed. The data collected was based on two instruments, then it was analysed, described and concluded.

Table 1

Aspects and instruments of the research

Aspects	Instrument
Friendship	Nomination reciprocity technique
Interaction	Guided observation
Social self-perception	Social Self-Perception questionnaire
Acceptance of peers	Sociometric rating scale

The Subject of the Research

Fifth grade students with SEN and those without SEN in ten inclusive elementary schools, located in Padang are the subject of this research. More information is presented in Table 1. These categories of students were utilised because 1) at this age they tend to perceive and understand the position of their relationship, and 2) they understand how to fill in a nomination and the scale of the assessment. Also, this study involves students with SEN in ten inclusive schools with the details of the needs as follows:

Table 2

**The number of Students with SEN in grade V
Elementary School Padang**

No.	Special Educational Needs	Amount	Percentage
1.	Learning disability	23	30.67%
2.	Mild autism	9	12%
3.	Slow learner	19	25.33%
4.	Moderate autism	5	6.67%
5.	Hyperactivity	10	13.33%
6.	Students with hearing impairment	2	2.67%
7.	Low vision	2	2.67%
8.	Communication disorders	5	6.67%
Amount		75	100%

Research Instruments*Assessment of Social Self-Perception*

The social self-perception was measured with the following three aspects, namely the Self-Perception Profile for Children, Self-Description Questionnaire and Social Acceptance of Peers.

Assessment of Peer Acceptance

Acceptance of peers is measured by a sociometric technique which is classified into two, namely nomination procedure and rating of peers (Jiang & Cillessen, 2005). The rating of peers is carried out by asking all children in the class to list three classmates they like the most and those they do not like the most. The results of the nominations were converted into five categories of peer acceptance, namely popular, controversial, average, neglected and rejected (Wentzel, 2005). The level of peer acceptance is conducted by marking the sheet of nominations of peers on a piece of paper with a 15 minutes timeframe.

Assessment of Friendship

According to Laursen, Bukowski, Aunola & Nurmi (2007), friendship is measured by the reciprocal nomination conducted by students.

Assessment of Social Interaction

Observation techniques are used to measure the interaction between students with SEN and their peers (Blatchford, Bassett & Brown, 2005). It focuses on the number of interaction between children with SEN and their peers in a class for 30 minutes. The calculations are the total interaction between children with SEN and a teacher, and the number of interactions with their peers. Social interaction observations were conducted in various situations during learning and break time, either positively or negatively (Hamilton, 2005). Three students of the final semester in the Department of SEN with courses in Educational Research and have been trained to make observations were observers in the study. After training, the agreement between observers was determined by calculating the three aspects according to Cohen's Kappa (Wongpakaran, Wongpakaran, Wedding & Gwet, 2013) as follows: (1) ascertain if there is an interaction between children with SEN and their peers, (2) initiate or receive interaction, and (3) determine if there is interaction or no interaction between these children and their teacher.

Results

Based on the collected data, the results obtained are as follows:

Social Self-Perception

The score of social self-perception is calculated grounding on the questionnaire results with a score ranging from 6–24. Social self-perception of students with or without SEN in the fifth grade is the same, additional results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Social Self-perception of students with special educational needs and students without special educational needs

Research Subjects	Social Self-perceptions score
Students with Special Educational Needs	17.2 (SD = 4.0) n = 75
students without special educational needs	17.5 (SD = 4.2) n = 145

Peer Acceptance

The level of peer acceptance of students with SEN is in the neglected and rejected category. However, some of this category of students also earned popular nomination among their peers. The percentage of peer acceptance categories in children with SEN is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

The percentage of peer acceptance categories

No.	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1	Popular	3	4.00
2	Controversial	5	6.67
3	Average controversial popular	9	12.00
4	Neglected	21	28.00
5	Rejected	37	49.33
		75	100

Table 4 shows that the majority of peer acceptance rates in children with SEN are neglected and rejected. However, when viewed from a gender perspective, boys were more in number than girls.

Friendship

Data of reciprocity friendship nomination are conducted by analysing the results of friendship nomination. Furthermore, the subgroups and social roles in the classroom were identified. Friendship is defined as a reciprocal relationship in which two children chose their best friend (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). Its data was categorised into five groups, namely: Type 1, with no reciprocity relationship, in which students with SEN are isolated; Type 2, there is a reciprocal relationship; Type 3, comprises two students with SEN having reciprocity friendship with other peers; Type 5, more than 50% of students with SEN have reciprocity friendship.

Table 5

Friendship of students with special educational needs

Research subject	Σ	Social participation				
		Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5
Students with special educational needs	75	19 (25.33%)	7 (9.33%)	3 (4%)	6 (8%)	40 (53.33%)

Interaction

The social interaction of students with SEN was carried out by counting the number of total interactions with peers and teachers. The analysis was continued by comparing the groups of students with and without SEN. The results of the analysis shows that students with SEN tend to interact with their peers with similar characteristics. The result is seen in Table 6.

Table 6

Interaction of students with special educational needs and students without special educational needs

Research subject	Starting interaction with peers	Accepting interaction with peers	Interaction with teacher
Students with special educational needs	10.7 (SD = 8.3) <i>n</i> = 75	7.1 (SD = 5.2) <i>n</i> = 75	8.8 (SD = 9.7) <i>n</i> = 75
Students without special educational needs	14.7 (SD = 9.6) <i>n</i> = 145	11.0 (SD = 6.4) <i>n</i> = 145	3.1 (SD = 3.7) <i>n</i> = 145

Students with SEN interact with their peers less (mean = 10.7, SD = 8.3) than those without SEN (mean = 14.7, SD = 9.6). The difference is significant with $t(114) = 2.39$, $p < 0.02$. Furthermore, the numbers of received interactions are also different, as those with SEN were less interactive (mean = 7.1, SD = 5.2) compared to those students without SEN (mean = 11.0, SD = 6.4; $t(114) = 3.6$, $p < 0.00$). In addition, students with SEN significantly have interaction with the teacher more than with students without SEN (mean = 3.1, SD = 3.7; $t(116) = 4.2$, $p < 0.00$).

Discussion

This study examines the social participation of students with/ without SEN in the fifth grade of inclusive elementary schools. Furthermore, it refers to four aspects of social participation previously examined, which also indicates that the condition of students with SEN is less favourable. The level of friendship

between the two groups showed no significant differences. Also, the social interaction of students with SEN is lesser than interaction with their peers compared to their teachers. The findings of this study are viewed negatively because their interaction with teachers is more valuable than with peers.

The results of this study show that students with SEN are less fortunate in gaining the acceptance of their peers. The level of acceptance by peers is significantly lower than those of students without SEN. Similarly, the social self-perception of students has no differences between the two groups. The research carried out by Koster et al., 2010, also shows that students with SEN tend to have high social self-perception. Some research also indicates that some of these students showed self-perception distorted, although there is a possible bias in the self-assessment (Pijl & Frostad, 2010).

The results of this study show that the social participation of children with SEN is significantly less than those without SEN. Furthermore, Marlina Marlina (2014) stated that social skills of students with learning disability, such as asking for help, discussing, following orders, asking questions and making self-corrections, tend to be low. The consequences of the results of this study is that students will have social problems in the future (Best & Best, 2013). This category of students is considered during social participation by protecting them from the negative effects of low-level peers acceptance (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). Social skills of students with SEN are increased by Peer-Mediated Intervention (PMI) (Marlina Marlina, 2014). Marlina Marlina (2014) stated that Peer-Mediated Intervention (PMI) is proven to be effective in improving social skills, such as asking for help, giving help, discussing, asking questions and self-correcting, in students with learning disabilities in inclusive elementary schools. Also, Marlina Marlina (2017) stated that social skills are improved by using the strategy of self-management which is an effective way used to start a conversation, game and maintaining the interaction of children with autism.

The development of inclusive education and its implementation in different regions gives considerations to academic and non-academic services. Increasing the quality of education and learning for students with SEN in inclusive schools give a challenge for schools to consider social services. The analysis shows that there is no significant difference between children with SEN and those without SEN in four aspects of social participation. Furthermore, this may be a result of a low number of children in some sub-groups. However, choosing a larger sample is also difficult because in most primary inclusive schools only few students with SEN are included. The results of this study are important because students with SEN have less social participation with their peers. Social participation is an important part of the inclusive education implementation because it is needed in everyday life for all children.

Conclusion

The results show that the majority of students with SEN have a satisfactory level of social participation; however, when compared with normal peers, they find it difficult. In general, these sets of children have fewer numbers of friends with less cohesive friendship than their peers. Also, they tend to interact with fewer peers less, interact more with teachers, and are less accepted by peers with normal condition. Furthermore, there is no significant difference in social participation of children with SEN and normal peers.

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Summary

Students with special educational needs who are in elementary inclusive school face the risk of social problems owing to their failure in understanding the social environment and difficulty in interpreting the social initiation of other children (M Marlina, 2017). Some studies found that children who are diagnosed with autistic disorder and those with the behavioral disorder have a problem in building relationships with peers and face the risk of becoming isolated in classrooms (Kasari, Locke, Gulsrud, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2011); (Kasari et al., 2011). This article examines the social participation of students with SEN in four aspects, namely friendship, interaction, social self-perception, and peers acceptance. It also discusses their social participation in an inclusive school. Furthermore, the research descriptively analyzes the quantitative relationship between these four aspects of social participation.

The results of the analysis showed that students with SEN tend to interact with their peers with similar characteristics. The results of this study showed that students with SEN are less fortunate in gaining the acceptance of their peers. The level of acceptance by peers is significantly lower than those of students without SEN. Similarly, the social self-perception of students has no differences between the two groups. Research carried out by Koster et al., 2010, also shows that students with SEN tend to have high social self-perception. The results of this study showed that the social participation of children with SEN

is significantly less than those without SEN. The analysis showed that there is no significant difference between children with SEN and those without SEN in four aspects of social participation. Furthermore, this may be as a result of a low number of children in some sub-groups. The results of this study are important because students with SEN have less social participation with their peers. Social participation is an important part of the inclusive education implementation because it is needed in everyday life for all children.

It can be concluded that the majority of students with SEN have satisfactory levels of social participation, however, when compared to normal peers, they feel difficult. In general, these children have fewer friends with less cohesive friendships than their peers. In addition, they tend to interact with peers who are less, interact more with teachers, and are less accepted by peers with normal conditions. In addition, there were no significant differences in social participation in children with SEN and normal peers.

