

Teachers' Views on Social Skills of Students with Special Needs in Inclusive Classrooms

Sri Wahyuni^{1*}, Reswita², Dina Fitriani³

Pendidikan Khusus, Universitas Lancang Kuning, Indonesia^{1,3}
Pekanbaru, Indonesia

Pendidikan Guru Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Universitas Lancang Kuning, Indonesia²

Corresponding Author(*)

sriwahyuni91@unilak.ac.id



Check for updates

Article received: 24-04-2025, revision: 29-05-2025, published: 30-05-2025

Abstrak

This study explores teachers' perceptions of the social skills of students with special needs within Indonesian inclusive school settings. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews and direct observations involving teachers who work directly with students with special needs. The findings indicate that while some progress is evident, students often exhibit underdeveloped social competencies—particularly in verbal communication, adherence to social norms, and peer interactions. Participants underscored the necessity of individualized strategies tailored to each student's unique developmental profile. This study offers a novel contribution by presenting firsthand insights from Indonesian teachers, highlighting context-specific challenges and practices in fostering the social development of students with special needs. The results aim to inform the design of inclusive learning programs that are more attuned to students' social growth.

Kata Kunci: *Teacher Perception, Social Ability, Children with Special Needs, Inclusive Education*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become an important part of the education system in Indonesia, emphasizing the importance of equal access to education for all children, including those with special needs. In practice, inclusive education requires schools to provide a learning environment that supports the active participation of all students without discrimination. One of the challenges that is often faced in this context is the development of social skills in children with special needs (Schachter et al., 2019).

Social skills are an important aspect of children's lives, because through this ability they can build relationships with others, express feelings, and participate in social activities in a positive way. However, children with special needs often experience obstacles in this regard, both due to developmental conditions and limitations.

The aspects of social development that occur in early childhood are dynamic and are greatly influenced by the environment (Hatzigianni et al., 2023; Khusnani et al., 2023; Powell et al., 2024) In each stage of early childhood development, they show their own characteristics in their social abilities. For the process of developing children's social skills at each stage of development, ideally, it must be taken according to the child's age. If this is not appropriate, it will cause problems for the development of children's social needs because each child in each development has different social needs and other influences such

as the parenting style applied by their parents. Then the interaction extends to the next level, namely with neighbors around children and then to school. In the school environment, social development also extends to friendships, and a child's interaction with his peers can improve a child's developmental tasks. Children's social interaction with their friends offers a space to receive information from each other according to (Wahyuni et al., 2018). However, it is in the school environment that children experience social difficulties that include withdrawal from the environment. When a child enters a new environment or school, children are influenced or influenced by people in different social contexts. To achieve a good socialization, children must learn to make new adjustments (O'Sullivan & Ring, 2022; Pianta et al., 2020)

The role of teachers is crucial in helping children develop their social skills. Teachers not only serve as learning facilitators, but also as companions who are able to provide appropriate stimuli and interventions according to the characteristics of each child. And the lack of studies focused on teachers' perspectives on social interactions among children with special needs within Indonesian inclusive contexts. Therefore, understanding how teachers view the social skills of children with special needs is important to know, so that more effective and inclusive learning strategies can be formulated.

This research was conducted to explore teachers' views on the social skills of children with special needs that they assist in inclusive schools. The focus of the research is on teachers' experiences in dealing with children's social dynamics and the strategies they apply to improve students' social interaction skills.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Approach This was chosen because it is considered to be able to explore in depth teachers' views on the social skills of children with special needs in an inclusive school environment. The main focus of this case study is on the teacher's real experience in accompanying the children's social processes in the classroom (Sugiyono, 2016).

The research subjects consist of teachers who teach in inclusive schools and have experience in dealing with students with special needs. The purposive sampling technique was used to determine participants, with the main criterion being teachers who were actively involved in the learning process of children with special needs and had knowledge and experience in observing their social development.

Data was collected through two main techniques, namely in-depth interviews and direct observation. Interviews were conducted to understand teachers' perceptions of students' social abilities, while observations aimed to capture children's social behavior naturally in the school environment. All data obtained were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, namely by identifying patterns, themes, and categories from the results of interviews and observations that had been made.

To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher applied a triangulation technique, namely by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and field notes. In addition, the validity of the data is also strengthened through discussions with peers and re-checks by participants (member checks) to ensure that the interpretation of the data is in accordance with their experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that teachers' perceptions of the social skills of children with special needs vary greatly, depending on the characteristics of each child and the teacher's experience in accompanying them. In general, teachers state that the social skills of children with special needs in inclusive classes have not been fully developed optimally and require continuous intervention.

Some children seem to be able to establish simple interactions with teachers and peers, such as greeting them, responding to questions, or following instructions in groups. However, most teachers observed that the children still had difficulty expressing their feelings, understanding other people's emotions, and following social rules that apply in the context of group interaction.

In addition, teachers also noted that children with special needs tend to show limitations in social initiatives, such as starting conversations or asking friends for help. They are more likely to wait to be directed or tend to be alone in group activities. This is seen as a challenge by teachers in creating an inclusive and interactive learning environment.

Table 1. Assessment Indicators

No.	Indicator	Evaluation			
		1	2	3	4
1.	Children are able to adjust their emotions to disruptive peer behavior such as aggression. (C3)	AW		QA, EP EG	KA, AY, DSW, KL, SA, AS,
2.	Children are able to recognize emotions and label other people's emotions (C1)		AW	QA, EP EG, KL	KA, AY, A, SA, AS,
3.	Children are able to build cooperation with others (C6)	AW	KL	EG, SA	QA, KA, AY, EP AS,
4.	Children are able to create and maintain interactions with adults or peers (C6)	AW		KL	A, Y, EP SA, AS, EG
5.	Children are able to carry out the learning process that occurs (C3).		AW	JE	QA, KA, AY, DSW, Y, KL, SA, AS, EG
6.	Children are able to adapt to the learning that occurs (C3)		AW		KA, AY, A, Y, KL, EP SA, AS, EG
7.	Children are able to connect learning that occurs anywhere (C2).		AW		QA, KA, AY, A, Y, KL, EP SA, AS, EG
8.	Children are able to express opinions simply (C3)	AW		AY	QA, KA, DSW, KL, EP SA, AS, EG
9.	Children are able to solve problem in simple terms (C4)		AW		QA, KA, AY, DSW
10.	Children are able to mention questions and answers (C1)	AW		EG, DSW	QA, KA, AY, KL, EP SA, US,
11.	Children are able to accept and understand criticism and suggestions (C2)		AW	QA	KA, AS, EG

Teachers emphasize the importance of flexible and individualized learning approaches to support children's social development. They stated that the success of children's social interaction is greatly influenced by the consistency in providing stimuli and teachers' understanding of the needs and potentials of each student. In addition, teachers also recognize the need for collaboration between schools, parents, and experts to design integrated and sustainable social development strategies.

This research was conducted using a checklist instrument and there are several indicators in it. There are several indicators that have not developed in AW, namely: (1) AW has not been able to adjust his emotions to the behavior of peers who disturb him. (2) AW has not been able to build cooperation with others. (3) Y has not been able to adjust to a new environment with appropriate emotions and behavior. (4) AW has not been able to create and maintain interactions with adults or peers. (5) AW is not used to being friendly to others. (6) AW has not been able to show a sense of pleasure in playing/learning with peers. (7) AW has not been able to adapt to the learning that is taking place. (8) AW has not been able to express opinions simply.

Based on the results of observations that have been carried out at school, this can be seen from several behaviors and communication patterns that AW always displays at school. AW can follow learning at school well, but AW does not communicate with teachers or peers. When learning in class takes place, AW is just quiet and follows what the teacher orders. When singing activities, AW just claps his hands to the rhythm of the song. AW shows fear when he is invited to communicate, so AW does not give any response when greeted by his friends and teachers, AW also looks confused when the teacher requires him to join his friends.

The behavioral symptoms that always appear are that Y always feels sad when he is among his friends, he also always looks gloomy, is more sensitive to the words and actions of other children, prefers his toys to playing with his friends, rarely interacts with teachers and friends, and is less brave to appear in front of the class, feels afraid if asked to interact with teachers and peers.

While in class, based on the observation results, AW was unable to establish relationships with groups or try to actualize himself as an individual. AW still always wanted to be accompanied by his mother and he could not be separated from his mother, so that the process of socialization with peers and teachers was hampered. During two semesters of school, Y was more often seen afraid, anxious and even tended to be silent when meeting people he had just met or people who were not close to him.

Based on the results of the study, it can be said that AW experienced social withdrawal, which is an act of refusing or avoiding having social interactions, and as a form of defense against something that is considered unsafe. Children with social withdrawal behavior usually do not have many friends, because children rarely have social interactions (Pratiwi, 2020). Children tend to only pay attention to their surroundings, and do not directly participate in the environment.

The reason Y is said to be experiencing social withdrawal can be attributed to the following characteristics. The characteristics of individuals who experience withdrawal from the environment include: (1). Often seen alone or daydreaming (2). Seemingly unenthusiastic in activities in everyday social environments (3). Doing whatever is ordered or requested by others even though it is not liked or desired. This aims to avoid conflict with that person and avoid longer interactions. (4). Not talking much (passive) especially in expressing opinions in public (5). Feeling uncomfortable and unsafe in social environments (gathering with many people) (6). Preferring to do things alone, even though they should be done together or in groups.

In the characteristics above, there are several points in AW, namely: (1). Often seen alone or daydreaming (2). Seems unenthusiastic in activities in everyday social environments . (4). Doesn't talk much (passive) especially in expressing opinions in public (5). Feels uncomfortable and unsafe in social environments (gathering with many people) (6). Prefers to do things alone, even though they should be done together or in groups. Based on the characteristics above, there are several studies

that prove that the parenting factor is a factor that supports social withdrawal in AW. Theories about attachment state that the attachment that is established in the early life between children and parents is the foundation that determines the child's relationship patterns until they are adults. Attachment can be interpreted as a human tendency to form a strong bond with others (Trigwell et al., 1994). Secure attachment can predict social competence in children while insecure attachment predicts loneliness, anxiety and socially withdrawn behavior (Astuti et al., 2022).

Attachment itself is greatly influenced by how parents (in this case usually represented by the mother) respond, direct and provide opportunities for children to explore their environment. Symptoms of social withdrawal tend to get worse with age (Tilley et al., 2020). Therefore, handling of social withdrawal must be done as early as possible. One of the factors that plays a major role in the formation of social withdrawal in children is the interaction between children and parents. Various studies have shown that certain parenting patterns can reduce the risk of children experiencing social withdrawal.

AW's social development at home, AW plays more often indoors than outdoors and even when playing outdoors, AW is supervised by his father (attachment in AW's case is represented by his father because his mother works abroad), also supported by the freedom to use gadgets so that interaction with peers is less established. While at school, AW is quieter and looks afraid and embarrassed when interacting with his peers. AW also prefers to withdraw from his friends, so he rarely interacts with his friends. It can be said that this attachment parenting factor has a major impact on early childhood (Mamuladze et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2012). Especially for AW being treated like a child who does not have the right to interact with people outside the home, so that AW becomes a spoiled person and cannot be separated from the people in his home environment. For this reason, there are several strategies to reduce social withdrawal, namely based on the research results of (Engel & Munger, 2003) which show a significant influence between the role-playing method and children's social interactions.

Behavioral Interventions that have been implemented for one month through (1) Positive Modeling and Reinforcement conducted through morning journals with AW, namely a special 10-minute session to greet, ask and motivate AW with smiles, hugs and fun things. (2) Social Skills Learning by involving AW in every activity of sharing cakes and sharing stories with friends, helping friends, and playing with friends (3) Classroom Environment Management to create a classroom environment that is conducive to students' social development, especially for AW to be able to work together by combining AW in groups during class learning. So that the results of behavioral interventions are obtained which are based on the following social development indicator checklist:

The findings of this study reinforce the understanding that the social skills of children with special needs in inclusive school environments still require intensive and ongoing support. Teachers play an important role in this process, because they are the ones who interact most often with children in the school environment and have a strategic role in creating a friendly and supportive learning situation.

In general, limitations in the ability to communicate, understand emotions, and establish relationships with peers are the main challenges faced by children with special needs. This is in line with the findings of various previous studies which state that children with special needs often experience obstacles in the social aspect due to their developmental conditions. Teachers realize that this social aspect cannot be

separated from the overall learning process, because the ability to interact affects children's self-confidence and involvement in class activities.

The teacher said that efforts to improve children's social skills need to be done in a planned manner and based on individual needs. Flexible and adaptive strategies are considered more effective in responding to the diversity of children's characteristics. This includes the use of contextual learning media, providing concrete examples through modeling, and creating a classroom atmosphere that supports cooperation and communication (Partington et al., 2024).

This discussion shows that improving the social skills of children with special needs cannot be burdened solely on teachers. Support from parents, schools, and support staff is essential to creating a truly inclusive education system. Collaboration between parties is the key to success in developing children's social potential to the maximum. Thus, it is necessary to formulate policies and programs that are able to support teachers in designing and implementing appropriate social learning strategies, as well as providing ongoing training to improve teacher competence in handling children with special needs more effectively and empathetically.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the social skills of children with special needs in inclusive school settings require continuous, structured, and individualized support. Teachers observed that many students still struggle to engage in effective social interactions—particularly in areas such as peer communication, understanding social norms, and appropriate emotional expression. These challenges highlight the need for targeted, student-centered strategies that are responsive to each child's unique developmental profile. Teachers emphasized their critical role in facilitating social development through adaptive teaching approaches and fostering inclusive classroom environments. They also recognized the value of collaboration with parents and multidisciplinary professionals in supporting students' social growth. However, this study has several limitations. The sample was limited to a small number of teachers within a single geographic and institutional context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the data relied solely on teacher perspectives, without incorporating views from students, parents, or other stakeholders.

REFERENCES

- Astuti, R., Erni Munastiwi, & Muqowim. (2022). Digital Parenting: Utilizing Technology to Instill Islamic Education Values in Young Children. *TADRIS: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 17(2), 365-379. <https://doi.org/10.19105/tjpi.v17i2.7468>
- Engel, D. M., & Munger, F. W. (2003). *Rights of inclusion: Law and identity in the life stories of Americans with disabilities*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hatzigianni, M., Stephenson, T., Harrison, L. J., Waniganayake, M., Li, P., Barblett, L., Hadley, F., Andrews, R., Davis, B., & Irvine, S. (2023). The role of digital technologies in supporting quality improvement in Australian early childhood education and care settings. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 17(1), 5.
- Khusnani, A., Husein, R., Jufriansah, A., Thalo, O. W. J., Rahmawati, K. D., Fitri, M., & Adina, C. A. (2023). Identification of Understanding of Disaster Preparedness in the School Environment. *Indonesian Journal on Learning and Advanced Education (IJOLAE)*, 5(3), 233-248.
- Mamuladze, N., Makaradze, N., Didmanidze, I., Gurgenidze, M., Samnidze, N., Akhvlediani, N., Zaslavskiy, V., & Olga, Y. (2023). Promoting Successful Inclusion of Students with Special Needs Using the Core Principles of Universal Design for Learning. *2023 13th*

- International Conference on Dependable Systems, Services and Technologies (DESSERT)*, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1109/DESSERT61349.2023.10416518>
- O'Sullivan, L., & Ring, E. (2022). A potpourri of philosophical and child development research-based perspectives as a way forward for early childhood curricula and pedagogy: reconcilable schism or irreconcilable severance? In *The Influence of Theorists and Pioneers on Early Childhood Education* (pp. 331-344). Routledge.
- Partington, P., Major, G., & Tudor, K. (2024). Deaf students' perception of wellbeing and social and emotional skill development within school: A critical examination of the literature. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 71(1), 55-68.
- Pianta, R. C., Hamre, B. K., & Nguyen, T. (2020). Measuring and improving quality in early care and education. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 51, 285-287.
- Powell, L., Spencer, S., Clegg, J., & Wood, M. (2024). *A country that works for all children and young people: An evidence-based approach to supporting children in the preschool years*.
- Schachter, R. E., Gerde, H. K., & Hatton-Bowers, H. (2019). Guidelines for selecting professional development for early childhood teachers. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 47, 395-408.
- Sharma, U., Loreman, T., & Forlin, C. (2012). Measuring teacher efficacy to implement inclusive practices. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 12(1), 12-21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2011.01200.x>
- Sugiyono, P. D. (2016). metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D. In *Alfabeta*, cv.
- Tilley, E., Strnadová, I., Danker, J., Walmsley, J., & Loblinzk, J. (2020). The impact of self-advocacy organizations on the subjective well-being of people with intellectual disabilities: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 33(6), 1151-1165. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12752>
- Trigwell, K., Prosser, M., & Taylor, P. (1994). Qualitative differences in approaches to teaching first year university science. *Higher Education*, 27(1), 75-84.
- Wahyuni, S., Reswita, R., & Filtri, H. (2018). Analisis Subjectif Well-being Anak Usia Dini yang Berasal dari Keluarga Berstatus Ekonomi Sosial Rendah di Kota Pekanbaru. *Cakrawala Dini: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 9(2), 63-74.