

SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AMONG CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

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ABSTRACT

This study explores social acceptance among children with general learning difficulties/children with special needs (CSN) using a qualitative approach involving structured interviews with 144 students and in-depth interviews with three teachers. The research highlights the social dynamics of CSN inclusion, emphasizing the importance of a supportive environment, positive teacher attitudes, and peer education programs in promoting social integration. Findings show that students, particularly females at the junior high level, generally hold positive attitudes towards CSN. At the same time, concerns over emotional behaviors like tantrums create interaction challenges, especially among elementary school boys. Teachers ensure equal participation for CSN through individualized support, inclusive activities, and peer support systems. This study's originality lies in its comprehensive exploration of peer attitudes across educational levels. It offers insights into gender differences, behavioral challenges, and the teacher's role in promoting inclusive education through adaptive teaching methods and social support.

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INTRODUCTION

Social acceptance is essential to child development, especially for those with learning difficulties. Children with learning difficulties in this study are intended as learning difficulties in general, where all children with special needs experience learning difficulties in general. Children with learning difficulties often face more significant challenges interacting with peers and participating in social activities. This social activity can impact their mental and emotional health and affect their ability to learn and develop optimally. This study explores social acceptance among children with learning difficulties, focusing on Peer acceptance and teachers' perspectives on the social interactions of students with learning difficulties.

Students' involvement in learning, in games, during breaks and meals together is one of the crucial indicators of social acceptance. These activities provide opportunities for children to learn, interact with peers, and build social relationships. McMahon and Parnell (2020) believe participation in social activities can improve children's self-confidence and social skills. However, children with learning difficulties often feel marginalized in this context, which can lead to them participating less and feeling isolated. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how the existing support system can encourage these children's participation in every activity.

Peer relationships are also a critical factor in social acceptance. Children with learning difficulties often have difficulty establishing and maintaining peer relationships. Research by Kauffman and Landrum (2018) suggests that children with learning difficulties may experience rejection or exclusion from their peer group, which can exacerbate feelings of low self-esteem and social isolation. Therefore, this study will explore the dynamics of social relationships between children with learning difficulties and their peers and the role of teachers in their social interactions.

The role of teachers in supporting social interactions cannot be ignored. Teachers are responsible for creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students, including those with learning difficulties. According to research by Scruggs and Mastropieri (2017), teachers who understand their students' social and emotional needs can help create a more positive atmosphere and support social interactions. This research will explore how teachers can build the social skills of children with learning difficulties and support them in interacting with peers.

Challenges in social interaction are another aspect that needs attention. Children with learning difficulties often face challenges that hinder their ability to interact effectively. These challenges may include difficulty understanding social cues, limited communication, or social anxiety. According to research by McIntosh et al. (2019), these challenges can cause children to feel alienated and less accepted by their peers. This research will seek information on teachers' role in dealing with these challenges and how they affect the social acceptance of children with learning difficulties.

Furthermore, according to research by Lane and Menzies (2020), collaboration between teachers, parents, and other professionals can provide significant support for children with learning difficulties. In the context of this research, it is crucial to understand that social acceptance is not just about positive interactions but also about how children feel accepted and valued by others. Social acceptance can affect children's mental and emotional health, as well as their academic success. Therefore, this research will provide deeper insights into social acceptance among children with learning difficulties and recommendations for better school practices.

Overall, this study aims to contribute to understanding social acceptance among children with learning difficulties by exploring peer acceptance, the role of teachers, and the challenges of carrying out social interactions. Hopefully, this study's findings can help educators, parents, and policymakers create a more inclusive and supportive environment for children with learning difficulties. By understanding how teachers' roles respond to

challenges, we can work together to improve the social acceptance of these children so that they can develop optimally both in and out of the school environment.

Importance of Social Acceptance in Childhood

The Importance of Social Acceptance in Childhood. Peer relationships are integral to child development, contributing to a sense of belonging, social skills, and overall mental health. Research consistently shows that children who experience social rejection are at risk for a range of adverse outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and poor academic performance. For children with learning difficulties, the stakes are even higher, as they are more likely to face barriers to social acceptance. This rejection can lead to social withdrawal, increase feelings of isolation, and further exacerbate their learning challenges, thus creating a vicious cycle of exclusion and underachievement. Promoting social acceptance is a matter of social justice and a critical educational imperative.

Current State of Research on Social Acceptance and Learning Difficulties

Current State of Research on Social Acceptance and Learning Difficulties. Research on social acceptance among children with learning difficulties is extensive yet fragmented. Many studies have explored the social experiences of these children, highlighting issues such as stigmatization, bullying, and social exclusion. However, these studies often lack a comprehensive approach that considers different types of learning difficulties and levels of social integration. In addition, most studies focus on the outcomes of social rejection rather than the factors underlying social acceptance.

Research Gap and Rationale for the Study

Research Gaps and Research Rationale Despite a growing body of literature, there are significant gaps in understanding the specific factors that promote or inhibit social acceptance among children with learning difficulties. In this study it emerged that children put forward requirements for them to befriend and share with their peers with learning difficulties. Previous research has concentrated on the negative experiences of these children without exploring the positive social dynamics that may facilitate their integration. This gap provides an opportunity for more in-depth research that identifies these children's challenges and seeks to uncover the conditions and practices that enhance their social acceptance. This research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of children's social experiences with learning difficulties and inform more effective inclusion strategies by addressing this gap.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The main objective of this study was to explore learners' acceptance of their friends with learning difficulties and teachers' perspectives on these social interactions. The interaction with learners evaluates the factors influencing social acceptance among children with learning difficulties in an inclusive education environment from the proposed requirements. At the same time, the teacher's perspective discusses 4 aspects:

1. participation in class and extracurricular activities, 2. peer relationships, 3. the teacher's role in supporting social interaction, and 4. challenges in social interaction.

This study explores the level of peer acceptance of children with learning difficulties, particularly in the context of playing together and sharing toys and food. It also aims to understand teachers' views on children with learning difficulties participation in classroom and extracurricular activities, their social relationships with peers and the role of teachers in supporting these social interactions. The research will also identify challenges in social interactions between children with learning difficulties and their peers.

This study will collect data through interviews with peers of children with learning difficulties to measure the extent of their acceptance of peers with learning difficulties. This acceptance will be assessed through how regular/typical students view their different peers and then concerning social activities such as playing together, sharing toys, and sharing food. This approach aims to identify how children interact with each other in informal social contexts and understand aspects of acceptance and cooperation in play environments.

In addition, interviews with teachers will be conducted to gain a more comprehensive picture of children with learning difficulties participation in classroom and extracurricular activities. Teachers will also be asked about the social relationships between children with learning difficulties and their peers and their role in promoting positive social interactions at school. Challenges faced in these social interactions will also be explored to identify possible barriers and find effective strategies for creating an inclusive environment for all children.

Key Publications and Literature Review

Research on social acceptance among children with learning difficulties has been an essential focus in education. Social acceptance not only affects children's emotional well-being but also impacts their academic and social development. In this review, we will discuss four main aspects related to the social acceptance of children with learning difficulties: peer acceptance, participation in classroom and extracurricular activities, the role of teachers in supporting social interaction, and challenges in social interaction.

Peer Acceptance

Peer acceptance is a crucial aspect of children's social acceptance. Research by Gresham and Elliot (2008) shows that children with learning difficulties often struggle to establish and maintain relationships with peers. These relationships can be due to various factors, including a lack of social skills, stigma, and negative perceptions from their peers. Children who experience difficulties in interacting with peers tend to feel isolated and have higher levels of anxiety (Schneider et al., 2010).

The importance of peer support in building positive social relationships has been recognized in many studies. A study by McLellan and McMorris (2013) found that social support from peers can help children with learning difficulties feel more accepted and

have higher self-confidence. Therefore, creating opportunities for children to interact and build peer relationships is crucial in improving their social acceptance.

According to research by Koster et al. (2010), involvement in group activities can increase the sense of belonging and reduce the stigma experienced by children with learning difficulties. Research shows that children involved in extracurricular activities, such as sports or arts, tend to have better social relationships than those not involved (Ferguson et al., 2012). These activities provide opportunities to interact with peers and help children build critical social skills.

However, participation in these activities is often hindered by a lack of support from teachers and peers. A study by McGregor and Campbell (2007) found that children with learning difficulties often felt alienated in the classroom, resulting in low participation in activities. Therefore, schools must create an inclusive environment that encourages all students to participate in activities together.

The Teacher's Role in Supporting Social Interaction

Teachers are essential in supporting the social interaction of children with learning difficulties. According to research by Brownell et al. (2010), teachers who understand the needs and challenges faced by students with learning difficulties can create a more inclusive classroom environment. Teachers can mediate social interactions, helping children learn social skills and build peer relationships.

A study by Odom et al. (2013) showed that teacher interventions, such as social skills teaching and small group organization, can improve children's social interactions with learning difficulties. In addition, teachers can also provide critical emotional support for children, helping them to overcome anxiety and increase their confidence in interacting with others.

Although there are many efforts to support children with learning difficulties in social interactions, they still face various challenges. Research by Kauffman and Landrum (2013) identified some key challenges faced by children with learning difficulties, including a lack of communication skills, difficulties in understanding social cues, and negative experiences from previous interactions. These challenges can make children anxious or afraid to interact with peers, hindering social acceptance.

In addition, the stigma attached to children with learning difficulties is often a barrier to them establishing positive social relationships. A study by McIntosh et al. (2011) showed that children with learning difficulties are often perceived as different by their peers, which can result in social exclusion. Therefore, addressing this stigma through education and awareness among students and teachers is essential.

In addition, training for teachers in managing inclusive classrooms and supporting children with learning difficulties is also essential. A study by Villa et al. (2011) showed that teachers trained in inclusive teaching strategies were better able to support the social interactions of children with learning difficulties. These programs can include teaching social skills, small group settings, and emotional support to help children feel more comfortable interacting with peers.

RESEARCH METHOD

Data analysis is conducted using qualitative analysis, suitable for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis begins with the transcription of all interviews. The data is then coded inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than being pre-determined by the researcher. This process involves reading and re-reading the data to identify initial codes relevant to the research question.

Next, these codes are grouped into broader themes that capture significant aspects of the social acceptance experiences of students with learning difficulties. Themes are refined through constant comparison and discussion, ensuring they accurately represent the data. For reliability and validity of the findings, member checking is conducted, where participants review and provide feedback on the themes to ensure they accurately reflect their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This method was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the subjective experiences of students involved in inclusive classrooms and the perspectives of their teachers and peers in a social context. This research focuses on two main aspects that influence the social acceptance of children with learning difficulties: (1) Peer acceptance and (2) Teacher's role in supporting social interaction.

The first aspect researched is how peer acceptance of children with special needs, acceptance is measured by the views of regular students towards their friends with learning difficulties, students' willingness to be friends, willingness to play together, and willingness to share food and toys. This study used semi-structured interviews with students and in-depth interviews with teachers to collect data. Observations and interviews were conducted in 48 educational institutions, with the majority from the Surabaya area and a small number from Sidoarjo, Porong, and Gresik.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with children with a total number of students involved of 144 students. The semi-structured interview questions allow flexibility to probe deeper into relevant topics that arise during the conversation (Patton, 2015). The research focuses on students from junior high to senior high school, given that these educational stages are critical for social development and peer relationship formation (Salmivalli, 2010). In the interviews, the researcher was assisted by university students as a data collection team in the field, the researcher used open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their experiences freely. For example, one of the questions asked was, 'Would you like to play with this child (while showing a photo of a child with special needs?)' The data obtained from these interviews were analyzed using narrative analysis techniques to understand how children with learning difficulties describe their experiences in social relationships.

For data derived from student interviews, to increase external validity, student interviews involved 144 students with a distribution of schools ranging from primary grades to upper secondary grades, with a distribution of conditions of child informants from different social backgrounds. Thus, by comparing data from various contexts,

researchers can evaluate whether the findings are relevant in various situations and groups.

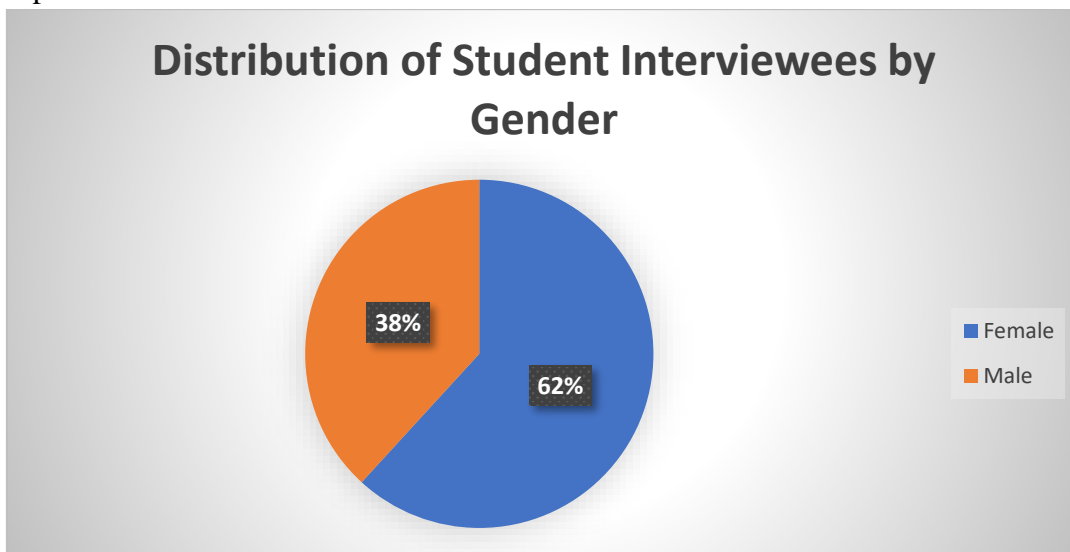


Figure 1: Distribution of student interviewees by gender

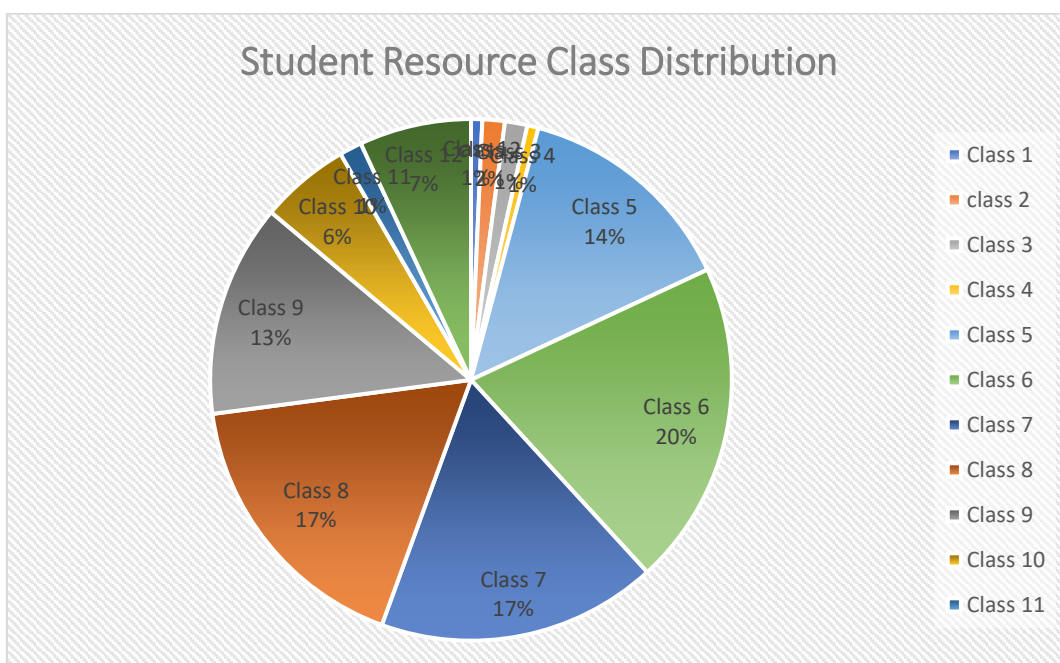


Figure 2: Student resource class distribution table

Teachers' role in supporting social interaction

The second aspect researched was the role of teachers in supporting the social interaction of children with learning difficulties. This research involved interviews with three teachers experienced in teaching children with learning difficulties (designated as Special Mentor Teachers by the school). Deep interviews were conducted with teachers to explore their experiences, feelings, and perceptions regarding the social acceptance of students with learning difficulties.

This study adopted a member-checking approach to ensure data validity and reliability. After the interviews, the data were transcribed and presented to the teachers for confirmation or approval, then ensured that the data collected reflected their proper understanding, as well as avoiding any misunderstanding or interpretation bias from the researcher.

Validity was also strengthened through peer debriefing. The researcher discussed with peers who are experts in special education to check the interview results and data interpretation. This interpretation can help identify researcher bias and provide new perspectives in analyzing the research results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of interviews with students

Based on interviews with some students, they had mixed views about the children with learning difficulties in their class. One mentioned that one of the children is quite lovely and can be spoken to well if guided, although sometimes there are difficulties in communicating. Other students mentioned two children with special needs in the class, one of whom was challenging to get along with and seemed shy. In contrast, the other was brave and social, like regular children, despite having difficulties understanding the subject. They also realized that although these children have special needs, it does not mean that they should be shunned or bullied. Instead, everyone can show them love and care.

The views of other students were more varied, with some feeling sorry for the condition of the children with special needs, while others considered them to have their specialties. In the case of SMPN 46 Surabaya, some students had been briefed by the accompanying teacher on how to communicate and interact with children with disabilities, so they were better prepared for this situation. However, some students felt afraid because they perceived the children as scary or dangerous. On the other hand, they admitted they felt compassion for the children because they were not born like normal children. This student's main concern was the fear that the child would suddenly become angry or act violently.

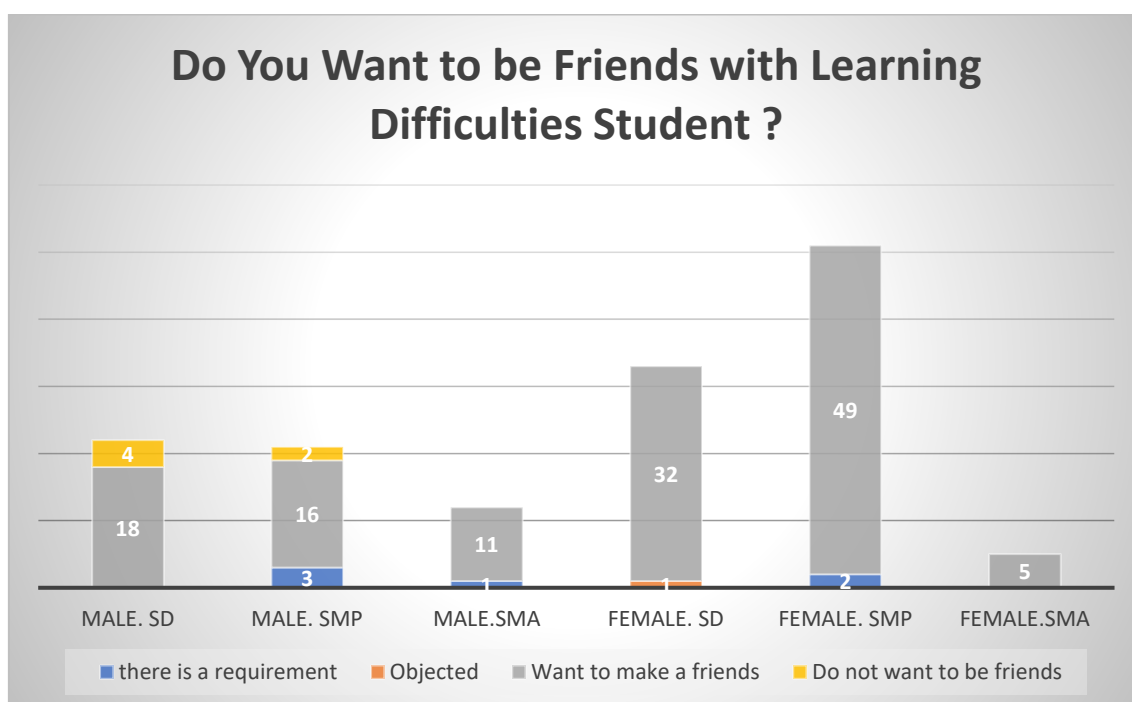


Figure 3: Question: Do you want to be friends with students with learning difficulties?

Primary school boys tended to be optimistic about possibly making friends with children with special needs. Of the 22 children, 18 were willing to be friends, while 4 stated they did not want to be friends. No children mentioned any conditions or objections. At the junior high school level, most of the boys also stated that they were willing to be friends with children with special needs, namely 16 children, although 3 children gave conditions. Only 2 children explicitly stated that they did not want to be friends.

In senior high school, all boys showed a very positive attitude. A total of 11 children wanted to be friends, and only 1 child put forward conditions. For primary school girls, 32 children were willing to be friends unconditionally, with only 1 child expressing reservations without stating further reasons. Most junior high school girls were very positive, with 49 children willing to be friends, although 2 children gave conditions.

At the senior high school level, all girls involved showed unconditional friendship, willingness, and no reservations. In general, children of different ages and genders showed positive attitudes toward the possibility of being friends with children with special needs. Girls were more willing than boys, especially at the junior high school level. Only a few children gave conditions or expressed unwillingness to be friends, with the highest number of primary school boys expressing unwillingness (4 children).

The reasons for not wanting to invite children to play include uncontrolled emotional factors, children with special needs who are picky about friends, and fear of tantrums and anger.

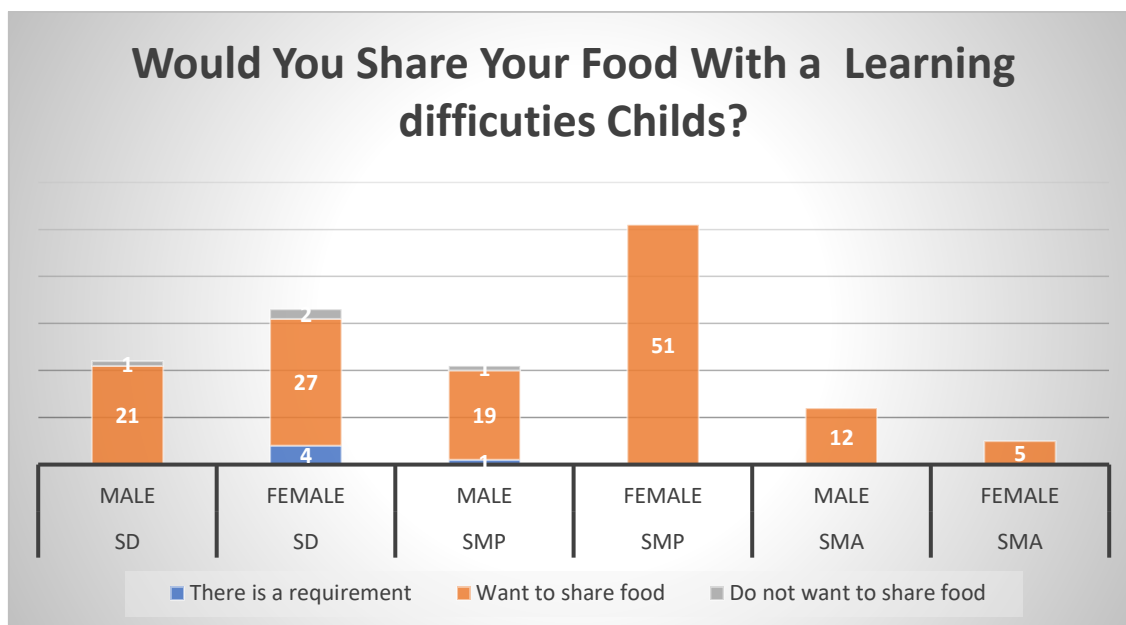


Figure 4: Question: Would you share your food with a child with learning difficulties?

Based on the table presented regarding the results of the questionnaire with the question, "Are you willing to share food with children with special needs?" here is the analysis and description of the results:

Most elementary school boys have a very positive attitude towards sharing food with children with special needs, with 21 children willing to share and only 1 child unwilling. Elementary school girls also have a positive tendency, with 27 children willing to share, but 4 children give conditions for sharing and 2 children who do not want to.

Boys at the junior high school level are also generally positive, with 19 children willing to share, although there is 1 child who gives conditions and 1 child does not want to share. All junior high school girls involved in this survey are willing to share food with children with special needs without any conditions or objections.

At the high school level, all the boys surveyed were willing to share without conditions, and none stated they did not want to. Like the high school boys, all girls were willing to share food without conditions. Overall, most students from various levels of education showed a very positive attitude towards sharing food with children with special needs. Girls at the junior high school level had the highest willingness to share (51 children), with none refusing. Meanwhile, some children at the elementary school level, especially girls, listed conditions before being willing to share (4 children). The number of children who refused to share was tiny, with only 1-2 children in each group, except for the junior high school girls and all high school students who showed no refusal at all.

Interestingly, after examining the reasons for refusal or conditions submitted by the students, including because the students understood that there were foods that their friends with special needs should not consume, "But they also sometimes can't eat food like ours," or the reason "they have brought their food."

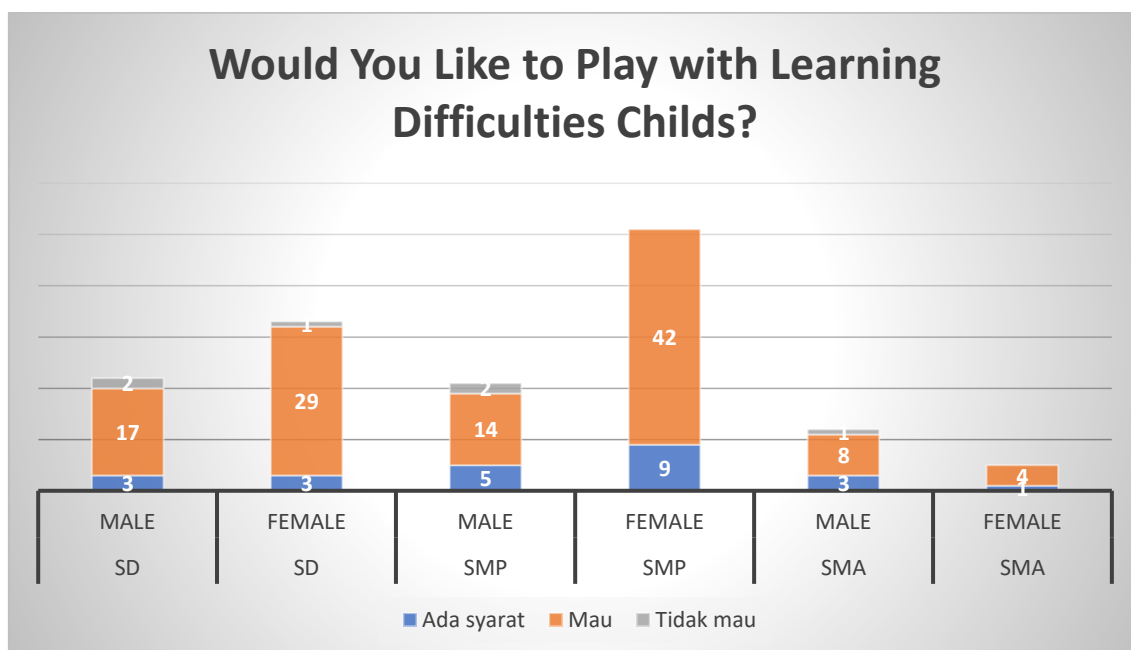


Figure 4: Question: Would you like to play with this child with Learning Difficulties?

Based on the table given regarding the results of the questionnaire with the question "Are you willing to play with children with special needs?" here is the analysis and description of the results: Most elementary school boys are willing to play with children with special needs, with 17 children stating their willingness. However, 3 children give conditions, and 2 are unwilling to play.

Elementary school girls responded very positively, with 29 children willing to play and only 1 child who did not want to. Similar to the boys' group, 3 children gave conditions. At the junior high school level, 14 boys were willing to play with children with special needs, but 5 children gave conditions. 2 children said they did not want to play. Junior high school girls were very open to playing with children with special needs, with 42 children willing. Even so, 9 children in this group stated their willingness to conditions.

At the high school level, as many as 8 boys were willing to play, although 3 children gave conditions, and 1 did not want to play. High school girls also showed a positive attitude, with 4 children willing to play. However, 1 child stated certain conditions before they wanted to play.

Most children of various age levels and genders were willing to play with children with special needs, especially among junior high school girls, who were all willing without any refusal. At each age level, it was seen that boys were more likely to give conditions or refuse to play than girls. However, several children, especially in the junior high school boys group, were given conditions before they were willing to play. The number of children who refused to play was deficient, only in several groups with a

maximum of 2 children. The conditions put forward by the children showed that although generally positive, some children needed more confidence or certain conditions before they were willing to interact more closely. "The student again said between wanting and not wanting, he wanted to invite him to play together, but he was also afraid that, for example, the child would suddenly throw a tantrum and be uncontrollable so that his normal friends would get hurt because they were hit, or injured by the special needs child" Or there is also the statement "because inclusion children are difficult to play and communicate with because they usually prefer to play with children who are also with special needs. Then they are also more often in a special room for special needs. But if asked to play or invite, I also want to"

The majority of students at various levels of education are willing to play with children with special needs during recess. Girls tend to be more willing to play, especially in junior high and high school. Some students put forward conditions before agreeing to play, especially in junior high and high school classes. The number of children who do not want to play is tiny, with refusal cases occurring more often among male students.

Another interesting fact is that students said they did not mind sharing toys and playing together but did not want to share food.

Results of interviews with teachers

For aspects of participation in class and extracurricular activities, the results of interviews with teachers related to children with learning difficulties (children with special needs) are as follows:

1. **Opportunity to Participate in Group Activities:** Teachers try to provide equal opportunities to all students, including children with special needs. However, some children require adjustments or additional assistance to participate in group activities fully.
2. **Involvement in Class Discussions:** Children with special needs have varying levels of involvement in class discussions. Some are more active if given appropriate support, while others are less confident speaking in public. Their responses are random and difficult to predict, often influenced by their conditions or learning difficulties.
3. **Participation in Extracurricular Activities:** Some children with special needs are involved in extracurricular activities, especially art and sports. However, their participation depends on personal interests and the accessibility of the activities.
4. **Interaction with Peers Outside School Hours:** Some children with special needs are involved and can interact with peers in extracurricular activities. Others are more comfortable interacting in small groups or structured settings, such as with a shadow teacher or in a resource room.
5. **Teacher Support:** Teachers provide specific guidance and assistance, including adjustments to teaching methods, individual guidance, and unique mentoring. This support is gradually released as the child develops independence.

Interviews on aspects of peer relationships:

1. **Having Close Friends:** Some children with learning disabilities have close friends, although fewer than other children. They tend to be more comfortable interacting with friends who are already familiar with and understand their needs.
2. **Consistency of Friendships:** Friendship patterns can be inconsistent. Children with learning disabilities often face challenges in maintaining long-term relationships because of difficulties understanding social norms or complex situations. However, some manage to maintain one or two close friends.
3. **Invitation to Join:** Sometimes, these children can play or join a group if their friends know and understand their condition. However, there are still cases where they are not invited because their friends do not understand how to interact.
4. **Rejection or Social Isolation:** Although rejection or social isolation is rare, there are still obstacles in group activities, where the presence of children with special needs is considered to hinder group work. The school is still seeking awareness of this.
5. **Comfort in Groups:** Their comfort in working or playing depends on the group structure and their friends' acceptance. If accepted, they feel comfortable, but social pressure may make them feel awkward or uncomfortable.
6. **Group Involvement:** Most children with special needs become part of a group, especially if given the proper support. Children with more severe needs are sometimes placed separately if they have difficulty following the rhythm or dynamics of the group.

For the aspect of the teacher's role in supporting social interaction:

1. **Classroom management:** Teachers use inclusion strategies such as holding group activities that involve all students, including students with learning disabilities, and ensuring that each student has an essential role in the activity. In addition, technology, such as online learning applications, is used to help students interact through discussion forums or group projects.
2. **Student collaboration:** Teachers actively encourage other students to collaborate with students with learning disabilities by dividing tasks into teams, praising for joint efforts, and encouraging sharing of responsibilities in groups.
3. **Teacher methods to improve social skills:** To improve the social skills of students with learning disabilities, teachers use programs such as the Buddy System that pairs them with friends who are more ready to help, as well as the Learning Centers method that supports independent or group learning so that students can learn effectively.
4. **Academic and non-academic training to improve social skills in academic and non-academic activities:** Social skills training is also provided in academic and non-academic contexts. In academics, teachers teach how to share tasks, work in teams, and solve problems. In non-academics, training includes interacting with friends, expressing desires, tidying up personal belongings, and being responsible.

For the aspect of challenges in social interaction:

1. Some children have difficulty communicating with their friends, especially in expressing feelings during more intense social interactions such as group discussions or games. However, some have good communication skills and do not experience obstacles in making friends.
2. Children with learning difficulties often experience emotional barriers that affect social interactions, such as fear, lack of self-confidence, or behaviors such as tantrums, which make it difficult for friends to understand them. It makes it difficult for them to focus or participate in group activities.
3. Some children have simple adaptation strategies, such as playing alone or joining small, more structured groups, where they feel more comfortable and can participate more actively.
4. Support from friends and teachers is there, where friends are ready to help in difficult situations and provide the emotional support needed.

Interview results show that children with learning difficulties or children with special needs have the opportunity to participate in group activities in class. However, they often require adjustments and additional assistance. **Participation in Class Discussions:** The activeness of children with special needs in class discussions varies. They tend to be more active when they get the proper support, but some feel less confident participating. Their responses are unpredictable and influenced by their respective learning conditions. **Extracurricular Activities.** Some children with special needs are involved in extracurricular activities, especially art and sports. However, their participation depends on their interests and the accessibility of the activities.

Social Interaction Children's involvement in extracurricular activities shows variation; some children can interact well, while others may have social difficulties. They are more comfortable interacting in small groups or structured environments.

Support from Teachers. Teachers are committed to providing appropriate guidance and assistance, including adjustments to teaching methods and unique assistance. This support will decrease as the child's independence develops.

The Role of Peers. The successful participation of children with special needs also depends heavily on peer support, which can increase their interest in engaging in various academic and extracurricular activities. Although challenges remain, teacher efforts and social support can help children with special needs participate more actively in the school environment.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that most students at various age levels and genders had positive attitudes toward children with special needs (ABK)/ students with learning disabilities in general, especially in the context of playing and sharing in the school environment. Female students, especially at the junior high school level, were more willing to play and share food with children with special needs than male students. On the other hand, some students gave conditions before they were willing to interact more closely, which were generally related to concerns about the emotional behavior or

communication skills of children with special needs. Refusal to play or share was more common among male students, especially at the elementary school level.

Despite the high willingness to interact, some students expressed fear of the possibility of aggressive or uncontrolled behavior from children with learning disabilities in general, such as tantrums. Students also recognized that there were special conditions that limited interaction. For example, some children with special needs preferred playing with friends who also had special needs or had a particular room at school. In addition, there was an understanding of certain food restrictions for students with learning disabilities, which was why some students refused to share food, even though they were willing to share toys and play together. These learning disabilities show that although positive attitudes dominate, there are still certain perceptions and concerns that affect social interactions between regular students and Students with Learning Disabilities, which can be addressed through better educational approaches regarding the needs and behaviors of children with special needs.

Several significant findings can be taken in the in-depth interview section with teachers regarding the participation and social interaction of children with special needs (ABK) in class and extracurricular activities.

1. **Participation in Class and Extracurricular:** Children with special needs are given the same opportunity to participate in class and extracurricular activities, although they require additional support or certain adjustments. The interests, accessibility, and support from teachers and friends greatly influence their participation in class discussions or extracurricular activities. In some cases, active participation occurs, but some children are less confident in more open or group social situations. The success of their participation is closely related to the involvement of teachers through individual guidance and inclusive learning methods.
2. **Interaction with Peers:** Children with special needs and peers' social relationships vary. Some children succeed in establishing close friendships, while others have difficulty maintaining long-term relationships. Peer support and understanding of ABK's condition are crucial to increasing their social involvement. These children's biggest challenge is social communication, where difficulties expressing feelings and understanding social norms can hinder interaction.
3. **Role of Teachers in Supporting Social Interaction:** Teachers play a vital role in creating an inclusive environment and supporting the social interaction of children with special needs. Various inclusion strategies are used, such as group activities, team collaboration, and teaching social skills through the Buddy System. Technology is also utilized to facilitate interaction through online discussion forums. This support helps students with special needs develop the social skills needed to interact better with peers in academic and non-academic contexts.
4. **Challenges in Social Interaction:** The main barriers to social interaction for children with special needs include communication difficulties, inability to express feelings, and emotional challenges such as fear or low self-esteem. Behaviors such as tantrums can also be a barrier to forming positive social interactions. However, there are

adaptation strategies that children use, such as joining small groups or playing alone, which help them feel more comfortable. Support from friends and teachers is essential to help them face these challenges and improve their social engagement.

Although challenges in social interaction for children with special needs still exist, strong support from teachers, peers, and an inclusive environment can improve their participation and social well-being in the classroom and extracurricular activities.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the research conclusions from the results of interviews with students and teachers regarding the participation and social interaction of children with special needs (ABK), several recommendations can be given to improve support.

1. **Improving Teacher Assistance and Support: Teacher Training:** Continuous training is needed for teachers on how to handle children with special needs, especially in managing communication and social interaction in the classroom. This teacher training is essential to ensure that children with special needs receive the proper support in class participation and group activities. **Differentiated Instruction Approach:** Teachers need to apply various teaching methods to adjust to the individual needs of ABK, such as providing opportunities to learn in small groups or using learning media appropriate to the child's condition.
2. **Strengthening Inclusive Programs in Schools:**
Inclusive Group Activities: Schools must create more inclusive group activities where all ABK and non-ABK students can participate. These activities increase ABK involvement and encourage peers to better understand and accept children with special needs. **More Consistent Implementation of Buddy Systems:** Buddy System programs, where children with special needs are paired with peers willing to help, must be expanded and implemented consistently. This can help increase the comfort and social engagement of children with special needs.
3. **Increasing Understanding and Empathy Among Peers:**
Social Education and Awareness Programs: Schools can hold regular education programs about social inclusion and how to interact with children with special needs. This can help reduce some students' stigma or misunderstanding about children with special needs, thereby creating a more empathetic and supportive environment. **Peer Activities Outside the Classroom:** Create more opportunities for students to interact with children with special needs outside of class, such as extracurricular activities or games during recess. These recreational activities can strengthen friendships and help children with special needs feel more accepted in the school environment.
4. **Adapting Extracurricular Activities to be More Accessible:** **Extracurricular Accessibility for Children with Special Needs:** Schools need to ensure that extracurricular activities are accessible to children with special needs by providing additional support or modifications to suit their needs. This may include providing special tutoring in arts or sports activities so they can more easily participate.

Increasing Activity Diversity: Providing various extracurricular options that can meet the interests and abilities of diverse students, including children with disabilities, so that they can find activities that match their interests and feel motivated to participate.

5. Developing Social Skills Specific to Children with Special Needs: Ongoing Social Skills Training: Schools can develop more systematic social skills training programs for children with special needs. This training can include communicating effectively, understanding social norms, managing emotions, and participating in group activities. Focus on Building Self-Confidence: Children with special needs often feel less confident in social situations. Therefore, the training and support should focus on increasing their confidence to interact with their peers.

By implementing these recommendations, it is hoped that children with special needs can be more actively involved in class and extracurricular activities and establish better social relationships with their peers.

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