

Social Inclusion in Physical Education: Regular Students' Perspectives on Peers with Special Needs

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Abstract

Background of study: This study is motivated by the importance of understanding regular students' perspectives toward students with special needs in Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning to support the creation of an effective and harmonious inclusive educational environment in schools.

Aims and scope of paper: This study aims to describe the perspectives of regular students towards students with special needs in Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning at State Junior High Schools in Surakarta City.

Methods: The study was conducted in three inclusive schools, namely SMP Negeri 12 Surakarta, SMP Negeri 20 Surakarta, and SMP Negeri 22 Surakarta. The research approach used was descriptive quantitative. Data collection was carried out using athletes. There were 120 samples in this study. The data analysis technique used was the percentage technique. There were four dimensions of perspective studied, namely (1) acceptance, (2) social interaction, (3) empathy and understanding, and (4) support and collaboration.

Results: The results of the study indicate that the perspective of regular students towards friends with special needs in Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning at inclusive public junior high schools in Surakarta City is in the fairly good category, with a neutral tendency.

Conclusion: The Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning process at inclusive public schools in Surakarta City has been running quite inclusively.

Keywords: Perspective; Children with Special Needs; Inclusion; Adaptive Physical Education

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays an important role in advancing the nation. The state has an obligation to provide quality education for all its citizens (Attahakul, 2025). The rights and obligations of Indonesian citizens in education are regulated in Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution. Paragraph 1 of Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution states that every citizen has the right to education (Khairunnisa et al., 2023). Based on this paragraph, education is a right for all Indonesian citizens without exception, including children with special needs. The national education system, as regulated in Law Number 20 of 2003, emphasizes that every citizen has the same right to education, including students with special needs. Students with special needs receive educational services at special schools and inclusive schools. Special schools are schools specifically designed to meet the educational needs of students with various disabilities (Shutaleva et al., 2023). These schools provide a curriculum, facilities, and educated and trained teaching staff to support the development of children with special needs in accordance with their specific needs (Yuwono & Okech, 2021). Meanwhile, inclusive schools implement inclusive education, which is an approach that provides opportunities for all students, both regular and special needs students, to learn together. Inclusive schools modify the curriculum and provide the necessary support, such as infrastructure, adaptive learning aids, and safety and security measures, so that

students with special needs can learn together with regular students (Karagianni & Drigas, 2023). In addition to providing physical facilities, inclusive schools must also pay attention to non-physical needs, such as psychological and emotional needs, social needs, and the need for acceptance and appreciation (self-esteem). The acceptance of students with special needs in regular schools is based on the Education for All (EFA) movement, which is part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Goal 4 on Quality Education, which emphasizes inclusive education, equality, and lifelong learning. Inclusion is defined as a continuous process of identifying and removing barriers to learning and participation for all students. Furthermore, Booth and Ainscow (2011) in *The Index for Inclusion* explain that inclusion encompasses three main dimensions, namely (1) Inclusive culture building values, attitudes, and beliefs that support acceptance of differences; (2) Inclusive policy establishing rules and policies that ensure equal access; (3) Inclusive practice implementing learning and assessment methods that value diversity.

Regulations on inclusive education in Indonesia are stipulated in Permendiknas Number 70 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities and Special Talents and/or Abilities. This regulation serves as the legal umbrella for regular schools to provide learning that accommodates the needs of students with various characteristics. In addition, Indonesia has also ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) through Law No. 19 of 2011, which mandates the state to guarantee access to inclusive education at all levels. The existence of inclusive schools is further strengthened by Permendikbudristek Number 48 of 2023, which regulates the obligation of formal education units to accommodate students with disabilities and not to allow rejection or discrimination based on disability. With this regulation, all schools must prepare themselves to realize inclusive education. Inclusive education means that every child is unique and has different potential and is entitled to learning support that suits their needs. The main objective of inclusive education is to ensure that every child, regardless of their physical, mental, social, economic, or cultural conditions, has the same opportunity to access and succeed in education. The main principles of inclusive education include: (1) Accessibility: All children have the right to be accepted in regular schools; (2) Active participation: Children with special needs participate fully in learning and social activities; (3) Equal opportunities: All students receive support according to their individual needs; (4) Social justice: Schools are places to eliminate discrimination and build empathy; (5) Collaboration: The involvement of teachers, parents, the community, and the government in supporting educational success.

In practice, inclusive schools in Indonesia still face many challenges. These challenges arise from physical and non-physical needs in inclusive schools (Widyastono et al., 2024). These challenges are even more apparent in Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning because Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning emphasizes physical activity or psychomotor aspects and requires a high level of social interaction as learning takes place directly or through direct and repeated practice, group interaction, or physical activities that require cooperation and active participation from all students. For students with special needs, this condition can be an obstacle if they are not supported by positive attitudes from their regular peers (Paulsrud & Nilholm, 2023). One indicator of the success of inclusive learning in Physical Education, Sports, and Health subjects is the high level of participation of regular students and students with special needs. This is in line with the statement which explains that inclusive education is a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all students by increasing their participation in learning,

culture, and the school community and reducing exclusion from education. This approach emphasizes that every child has the same right to participate fully in school life without discrimination (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024). All students, without exception, can participate in learning activities enthusiastically and consistently. In Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning, students with special needs can actively participate and blend in with regular students if they are accepted, understood, and accommodated by regular students. Therefore, it is necessary to know the perspectives of regular students towards their friends with special needs in Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning because knowing the perspectives of regular students towards their friends with special needs is key to measuring the extent to which inclusive values have been embedded in the school culture. The purpose of this study is to determine the perspectives of regular students towards their friends with special needs in Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning. This information is very necessary to understand the dynamics of social interactions in inclusive classes in Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning. The picture of social dynamics obtained can be used as a basis for teachers to design Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning strategies in inclusive classes. The strategies designed by teachers are expected to support academic development and build a friendly and inclusive social environment.

METHODS

This research is quantitative research using descriptive methods. Quantitative research methods are research methods based on positivism philosophy, used to study specific populations or samples, collect data using research instruments, and perform statistical data analysis with the aim of describing or testing predetermined hypotheses. (Sugiyono, 2019). The purpose of this study was to describe the perspectives of regular students toward students with special needs in Physical Education, Sports, and Health classes at public junior high schools in Surakarta City. The study was conducted at three inclusive schools, namely SMP Negeri 12 Surakarta, SMP Negeri 20 Surakarta, and SMP Negeri 22 Surakarta. These three schools were selected because they are public schools that have implemented inclusive education programs. In these schools, students with special needs study together with regular students in one learning environment.

The population in this study was all regular students who were in the same class as students with special needs in the three schools. Thus, the population was all regular students in grades VII and VIII who were in the same class as students with special needs and participated in Physical Education, Sports, and Health lessons in the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. Sampling was conducted in classes that had students with special needs and were actively participating in Physical Education, Sports, and Health lessons. Each school had two inclusive classes from which data was collected. The number of students in each class was determined proportionally while ensuring equal opportunities for each student to become a research respondent. The distribution of the sample size from each school is presented in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Number of Samples in Each School

No	School	Inclusive Classes	Samples per Class	Total Samples
1	SMP Negeri 12 Surakarta	2 class	21 dan 19	40
2	SMP Negeri 20 Surakarta	2 class	20 dan 22	42
3	SMP Negeri 22 Surakarta	2 class	19 dan 19	38

The variable in this study is the perspective of regular students towards the presence of students with special needs in their class. To determine the students' perspective, four dimensions were used, namely: (1) Acceptance, (2) Active involvement, (3) Support and assistance, and (4) Collaboration and cooperation. The students' perspectives were measured using a questionnaire consisting of 20 questions. Each statement was measured using a five-point Likert scale, namely: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaire was validated through expert judgment by adaptive physical education lecturers and tested on students outside the research sample to measure its validity and reliability. The test results showed that all statements were valid and the instrument had a high reliability level with a Cronbach's Alpha value > 0.80, making it suitable for use.

The data obtained will be processed so that the perspectives of the students are categorized into three groups, namely positive, neutral, and negative. The level of perspective is determined through intervals obtained using the formula. The formula used to determine the class interval is $i = ((X_i - X_r) + 1) / K_i$, where i represents the class interval, X_i is the highest score obtained, X_r is the lowest score obtained, and K_i is the number of class intervals.

Table 2. Category Interval Perspective

No	Interval	Category
1.	81 – 100	Positive
2.	54 – 80	Netral
3.	27 – 53	Negative

Based on the available data, the interval class obtained is 27, so the criteria for students' perspectives on the existence of and interaction with friends with special needs in Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning are listed (see Table 2). For each dimension of the perspective, the length of the class obtained is 7.

Table 3. Category Interval for Each Dimension

No	Interval	Category
1.	21 – 25	Good
2.	14 – 17	Fairly Good
3.	7 – 13	Not So Good

Thus, the criteria can be seen in the Table 3. After grouping, the results will be represented in percentage form. This applies to both perception grouping and dimension grouping. The formula used to calculate the percentage is $P = N/n \times 100\%$, where P represents the final result percentage, N is the value obtained from the questionnaire, and n is the number of respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In general, students have a neutral perspective toward friends with special needs in Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning. The following data was obtained from the research conducted. The data shows that only 7 out of 120 children, or 5.8% of respondents, had a negative perspective. Furthermore, 26 out of 120 children, or 21.6%, had a positive perspective. Meanwhile, 87 out of 120 children, or 72.5%, had a neutral perspective (see Table 4). This shows that most regular students have accepted the presence of friends with special needs in their learning environment. Thus, it can be said that the Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning process in inclusive public schools in Surakarta City has been quite inclusive.

Table 4. Distribution of Regular Students' Perspectives on Friends with Special Needs

No	Category	Number of children	Percentage
1.	Positive	26	21.6%
2.	Netral	87	72.5%
3.	Negative	7	5.83%

However, the neutral perspective of these students has not yet developed into full support and collaboration. This is consistent with the findings of a study in Spain that attitudes toward friends with special needs in physical education classes are still mostly neutral or moderate, especially among male students and in urban schools (Rojo-Ramos et al., 2023). From the perspective of social contact theory (Allport, 1954) equal and mutually supportive interactions between regular students and students with special needs can reduce prejudice and increase acceptance. In the context of this study, it appears that such opportunities already exist, but their intensity is not yet sufficient to create a truly positive perspective. Therefore, details of each dimension are needed.

In terms of acceptance, most students were quite open towards their peers with special needs, although a small number did not consistently demonstrate acceptance, especially when it came to physical activities or group games. The complete results for the acceptance dimension are shown in the following Table 5.

Table 5. Percentage of Acceptance Dimension

No	Category	Number of children	Percentage
1.	Good	14	11.6%
2.	Fairly Good	91	75.83%
3.	Not So Good	15	12.5%

In this dimension, 75.83% of respondents reported fairly good acceptance. This indicates that the value of inclusion has begun to take root. A literature review study states that inclusive strategies such as activity modification, the use of assistive technology, and teacher training play a significant role in supporting the participation of students with special needs and influencing the acceptance of regular students (Hidayat et al., 2024). However, the difference between good and poor acceptance is very small, only 1 child or 0.9%. This means that acceptance is not yet fully universal, possibly due to a lack of direct experience or stereotypical views of the limitations of students with special needs. Therefore, further intervention through school communication programs and collaborative learning may be needed to make acceptance more active.

In terms of active involvement, most regular students are open to active involvement, but there are still obstacles in establishing active communication and balanced cooperation with students with special needs during the learning process. The percentage for each group is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Percentage of Active Engagement

No	Category	Number of children	Percentage
1.	Good	9	7.5%
2.	Fairly Good	87	72.5%
3.	Not So Good	24	20%

There were 9 children or 7.5% with good involvement and 24 children or 20% with poor involvement. The rest, or the majority, were 87 children or 72.5% who had fairly good active involvement. This means that although regular students tend to be positive, aspects of cooperation and involvement with their peers with special needs are not yet optimal. Recent research states that the attitudes of students without special needs towards their

peers with special needs are highly dependent on their experiences in interactions and types of learning activities that involve collaboration (Rojo-Ramos et al., 2022). In addition, research on the implementation of inclusive Physical Education, Sports, and Health in Indonesia shows that obstacles such as a lack of adaptive facilities and teacher training are factors that hinder meaningful social interaction (Gazali et al., 2025). In the context of your school, this indicates that Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning needs to place more emphasis on activities that enable cooperation between regular and ABK students, rather than just individual physical activities or competitions. Support and assistance in measuring the level of empathy and ability of regular students in understanding the limitations and efforts of friends with special needs is presented in the following Table 7.

Table 7. Percentage of Support and Assistance Dimensions

No	Category	Number of children	Percentage
1.	Good	29	24.16%
2.	Fairly Good	88	73.3%
3.	Not So Good	3	2.5%

Based on the analysis results, 73.3% of students were categorized as fairly good, 24.16% as good, and only 2.5% as poor. This means that regular students sufficiently understand the conditions of their peers with disabilities and tend to appreciate every effort made by students with special needs in participating in Physical Education, Sports, and Health activities. This supportive attitude is an important basis for creating a mutually supportive learning environment that is free from discrimination. This is positive because, as explained by Davis (1996) support is formed through cognitive and affective processes: students understand the conditions of their peers with special needs and empathize with their feelings. Curriculum-based interventions have been proven to change students' explicit and implicit attitudes towards their peers with special needs (Wüthrich et al., 2024). This means that schools can consider awareness programs or special modules that increase regular students' understanding of the existence and challenges of their peers with special needs so that their empathy can be more active and profound.

The results show that in the dimension of Collaboration and cooperation, 70.83% of students were in the fairly good category, 24.16% in the good category, and 5% in the poor category. The representation is shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Percentage of Collaboration and Cooperation Dimensions

No	Category	Number of children	Percentage
1.	Good	29	24,16%
2.	Fairly Good	85	70,83%
3.	Not So Good	6	5%

These results show that most regular students express a desire to help their friends with special needs participate in physical education classes. However, the collaboration and cooperation they provide is still limited to classroom or field activities and has not developed into more active and spontaneous initiatives in joint sports activities. This shows that the desire to support friends with special needs is already quite evident, but active and spontaneous involvement is not yet optimal. The inclusive learning strategy book states that effective collaboration between teachers, students, and special assistants is crucial to the success of inclusive learning (Hidayat et al., 2024). Also, research on teacher attitudes in Saudi Arabia shows that experience teaching students with special needs and length of teaching experience influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, which in turn affects the support of regular students (Alhumaid et al., 2022). At the inclusive school in Surakarta,

the limited number of assistant teachers (GPK) and heavy workloads can be factors that slow down the formation of more intense collaboration. Cooperation between Physical Education, Sports, and Health teachers, BK teachers, GPK, and regular students needs to be strengthened so that support and collaboration can truly occur on a regular basis.

Taking all dimensions into consideration, the results of this study show that the inclusive learning system in public inclusive schools in Surakarta City already has a good foundation, with regular students beginning to show acceptance, empathy, and a willingness to collaborate with their peers with special needs. However, the dominant neutrality indicates that this condition is still in the adaptation stage and has not yet become a natural part of students' daily interactions. Schools and physical education teachers need to develop strategies that encourage the active participation of regular students in inclusive activities, for example through mixed regular-ABK group assignments, student reflection after learning, peer mentoring, and joint sports activities designed so that every student can contribute. This combination can strengthen empathy, social interaction, and support, so that the perspective of regular students can shift from neutral to positive in a tangible way.

CONCLUSION

Regular students' perspectives toward students with special needs in Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning at inclusive public junior high schools in Surakarta City are categorized as fairly good, with a neutral tendency. Most regular students demonstrate acceptance, empathy, and willingness to interact and cooperate with peers with special needs, although their involvement is not yet fully consistent. Among the four dimensions studied, Support and Assistance showed the highest result, while Collaboration and Cooperation still requires improvement to create a more inclusive learning environment. Therefore, the role of physical education and special needs teachers is essential in encouraging collaborative, adaptive, and empathy-based learning so that Physical Education, Sports, and Health learning can foster not only physical development but also character, empathy, and respect for diversity.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS AND DECLARATIONS

TWR designed the research, developed the theoretical framework, design the instruments, analyzed the data, and drafted the initial manuscript. MES contributed to the data collection process, conducted the literature review, and performed the final manuscript editing and proofreading.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript. All authors have confirmed that this work is original, free from plagiarism (with a similarity index of no more than 15%), complies with ethical standards, and that they are fully prepared to accept any consequences in the event of a violation of these provisions.

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