Mapping the Social Adjustment Issues in Children with Special Needs in Inclusive Schools

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Abstract. Every child has the right and opportunity to get an education, including children with special needs (CSNs). Inclusive schools are one of the choices of schools that include CSNs to study together with their peers in one class. One of the benefits expected from this inclusive school is to foster empathy, an attitude of understanding, accepting, and appreciating the differences between children with special needs and their age. However, the problems experienced by CSNs are often encountered, such as barriers to socializing with peers, CSNs tend to be alone, and it is not uncommon to find bullying against CSNs carried out by regular students in inclusive schools. These conditions cause CSNs to experience obstacles in psychological and social (psychosocial) adjustment and a lack of self-confidence. Furthermore, it affects social and emotional development as well as academic achievement at school. Therefore, an analysis of the mapping of problems that occur in inclusive schools is needed, especially regarding psychological and social adjustments in children with special needs. The purpose of this study was to analyze problems related to the psychological adjustment and social adjustment of children with special needs in inclusive schools in Surakarta. This research method uses an exploratory qualitative method. Data collection in this study was carried out through interview focus group discussions (FGD). The respondents of this study were 10 inclusive elementary school teachers in Boyolali. The result of the study found that the problems of social adjustment of CSNs in inclusive schools include: (1) at first regular students did not know the special needs of children with special needs, so many bullied children with special needs in inclusive schools; (2) CSNs feels they have shortcomings, tends to withdraw from the social environment; (3) crew communication is not smooth, tends to be quiet; (4) some regular students are not comfortable playing with CSNs; (5) regular students are less able to understand the way of thinking of CSNs; (6) teachers find it difficult to deal with CSNs, especially if someone has a tantrum; (7) teachers have difficulty finding learning methods that suit the special needs of CSNs.

Keywords: Children with Special Needs, Inclusive schools, Social Adjustment

1   Introduction

In the last few decades, policies in the world of education for children with special needs (CSNs) have changed. Quite a several CSNs studied together in regular schools with peers who do not have disabilities [15]. Generally, CSNs attend special schools which have homogeneous characteristics (one type of specialty). Through inclusive education, students with different needs can attend the same regular class as their peers. Inclusive education is an education delivery system that provides opportunities for all students who have special needs and have the potential for intelligence and/or special talents to attend education in regular schools together with regular students, ranging from preschool to high school levels [1].

This inclusive education is expected to improve the academic function of CSNs, as well as provide opportunities for regular students to able to socialize with CSNs (Pavri, 2001). One of the expected benefits of this inclusive school is to foster empathy, and an attitude of understanding, accepting, and appreciating the differences between children with special needs and their age [12].

The existence of CSNs in inclusive schools turns out to bring problems [15]. CSNs who used to study in a homogeneous environment, now need to adjust to a heterogeneous environment with various types of characteristics of regular students. Social adjustment can be defined as the individual's ability or capacity to react effectively and appropriately to the reality of situations, and social relations so that the demands of social life can be met acceptably and satisfactorily [11]. Social adjustment can be seen in the acceptance of peers, friendship, and participation in group activities [15].

In general, CSNs have difficulty adjusting to school and their peers because they are very sensitive to their limitations [10]. Many CSNs have difficulty adjusting to society, so they tend to withdraw from the environment [14]. Previous studies have compared non-disabled peers with CSNs and found that CSNs are usually rejected socially, unpopular, and unwanted as classmates, workmates, or playmates [6]. Furthermore, it was found that the reason for refusing CSNs was due to inappropriate social behavior. The rejection of CSNs is not because of the intellectual function of CSNs, but mainly because of anti-social behaviors, such as cheating, bullying, dirty talk, stealing, and so on [8].

One of the causes of CSNs' difficulty in adjusting to the school environment is due to barriers in social and communication skills as well as in behavior and academic abilities. In addition, the lack of acceptance from school residents also affects the emergence of psychological and social adjustment problems in CSNs. Some literature states that psychological and social adjustment is also influenced by the relationship between teachers and students, the better the teacher-student relationship, the better the mental and emotional health of students [9]. However, it was found that in general teachers have difficulty establishing optimal relationships with CSNs [2].

Based on the description above, psychological and social adjustment is an important ability possessed by CSNs. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to map the problems that occur in inclusive schools, especially regarding social adjustment, as well as map the acceptance of school residents towards CSNs in inclusive schools.

2   Methods

The research method used in this study is an exploratory qualitative approach. The participants in this study consisted of 10 inclusive elementary school teachers in Boyolali, Central Java (aged 30-50 years), who were selected using a purposive sampling strategy. The data collection technique used was interviews with face-to-face focus group discussions. Participants were asked to describe their experiences when dealing with students with special needs in inclusive schools. Interviews were conducted by recording audio and transcribed verbatim. Furthermore, the verbatim transcripts were analyzed using the Braun and Clarke thematic analysis [3] which included the stages of identification, analysis, and description of the themes.

3   Results

Based on the verbatim transcript, three major themes were identified in this study, including (1) problems faced by CSNs; (2) problems faced by regular students; and (3) problems faced by teachers.

3.1   Theme 1: Problems faced by CSN

Participants stated that CSNs felt they had shortcomings when compared to other regular students. In addition, CSNs tend to withdraw from their social environment.

"I have one slow learner, in his daily life he is silent during lessons. Likewise when studying in groups, he tends to feel different from his friends, has flaws, and I've asked him before." (Participant 4)

"My student has low vision, he usually plays alone, doesn't want to play with his friends. I think he lacks confidence when playing with his friends" (Participant 5)

3.2   Theme 2: Problems faced by regular students

Participants stated that most regular students lacked insight into students with special needs. Many regular students mock or bully CSNs. Participants stated that they often heard regular students call CSNs 'crazy' or 'weird'.

"In the past, when they first entered school, many regular students did not know about students with special needs in the classroom. At that time in my class there was one autistic child, he still liked to walk around during lessons and when he was angry, he threw things around him. Once, the autistic child was angry and beat me while shouting. After that incident, I saw his friends (regular students) call him a 'crazy kid'." (Participants 9)

"In my class, there are two CSNs, one is hyperactive, the movement is a lot and the other is a slow learner. If you are a slow learner, at first it is a bit difficult to get along but over time you can mingle with your friends. However, this hyperactive student is still unable to mingle with other friends. His friends often make fun of this hyperactive student and call him 'weird'." (Participant 10)

Regular students are less able to understand the CSNs way of thinking. In addition, they also look less comfortable when playing with CSN.

"I once met regular students who did group assignments with slow learners, the regular students could not understand that their friend had a different way of thinking from him. In addition, regular students tend not to want to play with these slow learners, because they cannot understand the rules of the game." (Participant 3)

3.3   Theme 3: Problems faced by teachers

Problems faced by teachers such as teachers finding it difficult to deal with students with special needs, especially when CSNs have tantrums. Participants also experienced difficulties in finding the right learning method according to the special needs of CSNs.

"To be honest, I still find it difficult to deal with my autistic students. So this child loves to draw, even during class. I used to reprimand him by taking drawing paper and colored pencils. But this child got angry with me, then cried and screamed. His classmates also looked scared, some even left the room. After that incident, I then looked for other ways so that he could focus more and not draw anymore during lessons." (Participant 1)

"Nowadays I'm getting used to the presence of CSNs in my class. I have started to be able to deal with my hyperactive students in class but to find a teaching method that can facilitate CSNs, I still have difficulties. It takes a long process to produce the right learning media for CSNs." (Participant 7)

4   Discussions

The purpose of this study is to explore the problems of social adjustment in CSNs in inclusive schools. Based on the results of the study, it was found that the problems of social adjustment in CSNs came from CSNs, regular students, and teachers. The problem of social adjustment originating from CSNs was found because CSNs felt that they had limitations, so they tended to withdraw from society. In line with this, several studies have also shown that there is a possibility of little interaction between CSNs and regular students so CSNs can withdraw and be ostracized by their peers [4].

Furthermore, problems originating from regular students include a lack of knowledge about CSNs, thus giving rise to bullying behavior in CSNs. In addition, regular students are also less comfortable when playing with CSNs. In line with that, several studies have found that there are risks experienced by CSNs in regular classrooms, such as being ridiculed by non-disabled friends, abused, and ignored [5].

The teacher's problems include difficulties in dealing with CSNs, especially if a tantrum occurs. This is related to teacher knowledge of disability, the higher the teacher's knowledge, the better in handling CSNs [7]. Furthermore, teacher acceptance is also associated with students' psychological and social adjustment. the better the acceptance of teachers, it will increase the resilience and academic achievement of students and inhibit the emergence of symptoms of depression and behavioral problems in students [13].

5   Conclusions

This study explores the problems of CSNs social adjustment that occur in inclusive schools. Based on the results of the research, problems that originate from CSNs include CSNs withdrawing from the environment and feeling that he has shortcomings. Furthermore, problems originating from regular students include the lack of knowledge of regular students, resulting in the bullying of CSNs. Bullying is more verbal than physical. Regular students also seem less comfortable playing with CSN. Teachers also experience problems including finding it difficult to deal with CSNs, especially when they have tantrums. In addition, teachers also experience difficulties in finding appropriate teaching methods for CSNs. This research can be used as a foothold for other researchers to conduct a wider survey to obtain quantitative data that can describe the conditions of social adjustment of CSNs in inclusive schools.

Acknowledgments

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