



Persepsi Guru Berlatar Belakang Non-Pendidikan Khusus Dalam Mengajar Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus di Sekolah Inklusi SD Gmim Kayawu Tomohon

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Abstrak

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This study aims to explore the perceptions of teachers with non-special education backgrounds towards children with special need in the context of inclusive education at SD GMIM Kayawu Tomohon. Inclusive education emphasizes equal access for all children, but is often hindered by teacher readiness and facilities. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with a single case study design, this research involved 7 teachers as informants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed using data reduction, presentation, and conclusion, as well as triangulation for validity. The results show that teachers' perceptions evolved from initial negative stereotypes to empathy through direct interaction. Main themes include understanding about children with special need and inclusion; the influences of children with special need on the process of learning and teaching; training and teaching methods; personal experiences and obstacle; teacher role and policy expectations. Perceptions are influenced by internal factors (personal experience) and external factors (school support), in line with Jalaluddin Rakhmat's (2018) theory of perception as a subjective process and interaction.

Kata Kunci: *Teacher's Perception, Children with Special Need, Inclusive Education, Case Studies, Elementary School*

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, humans are viewed as diverse beings (individual differences); disability or excellence are forms of human diversity. With this view, the difference between normal and disabled children is no longer relevant. Furthermore, when we witness the extraordinary achievements of individuals with disabilities who have succeeded at the world level, the distinction between “disabled” and “normal” becomes increasingly blurred, encouraging the education system to focus on developing the optimal potential of each student through inclusive support (Dapa, 2021).

Inclusive education is an approach that emphasizes equal access to education for all children, including children with special needs, without discrimination based on physical, mental, or intellectual conditions. In Indonesia, Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System provides the legal basis for inclusive education, but its implementation is often hampered by the readiness of teachers and supporting facilities. Teachers who do not have a background in special education, who generally teach in regular schools, often face challenges in



understanding and accommodating the needs of children with special needs, which can affect the effectiveness of inclusive learning.

Children with Special Needs are children who require special education services because they have different needs from other children in order to develop their potential optimally. The concept of children with special needs has a broader meaning than the term “exceptional children,” as explained by Dedy Kustawan (2012: 23). Children with Special Needs include those who have special needs, whether temporary or permanent, and therefore require more intensive attention and educational services. The term children with special needs itself is used to replace the word “exceptional children” with the aim of providing a more subtle and empathetic meaning than the term “children with disabilities.” Children with special needs usually have differences in terms of their ability to see, hear, think, adapt, physical condition and health, emotional and social aspects, specific learning disorders, autism, or special talents. All of these differences affect their special needs in the field of education and education-related services. These services can be provided through separate special education or through inclusive education that integrates them into a regular learning environment.

Parkay and Stanford (2011: 86-87) emphasize that teachers bear a great responsibility, especially when teaching in classrooms that include children with special needs. They divide this responsibility into three main points. First, teachers are required to be able to consult and collaborate effectively with other professionals involved in the education and development of children with special needs. This cooperation is important so that the learning approach applied is truly appropriate and supports the special needs of students. Second, teachers are required to build and maintain good working relationships with the children's parents, because the role of parents is vital in supporting the learning process of children with special needs both at school and at home. Finally, teachers need to have the knowledge and skills to master assistive technology that can help the learning process specifically for children with special needs, so that learning methods become more effective and the results are optimal. Teachers are required to apply appropriate learning methods to support the success of each student, including through curriculum adjustments and flexible differentiation strategies tailored to individual needs. This includes establishing an inclusive education system that ensures all children, without exception, including those with special needs, can participate in the learning process in regular schools with adequate support. Thus, a fair learning environment is created, avoiding discrimination and maximizing the potential of each student to develop optimally (Marentek, 2025; Novan, 2015: 131-154).

Teachers' perceptions of children with special needs are very important because they influence classroom interactions and the success of inclusion programs. According to Jalaluddin Rakhmat (2018), perception is a subjective process that is influenced by personal experiences, social stereotypes, and communicative interactions. The main factors that play a role in determining a person's perception come from needs, past experiences, and various other aspects that fall under the category of personal factors. Therefore, what actually influences perception is not the type or form of the stimulus itself, but rather the personal characteristics of the individual responding to the stimulus. This confirms that

perception is greatly influenced by who is responding, their background, needs, and life experiences. In the context of inclusive education, teachers' perceptions can evolve from negative stereotypes to empathy through direct experience, but barriers such as lack of training and facilities can reinforce negative perceptions. This study focuses on SD GMIM Kayawu Tomohon, an inclusive school that integrates children with special needs into regular classes without special assistant teachers, so that regular teachers must handle the diverse needs of students.

The purpose of this study is to describe non-special education teachers' perceptions of children with special needs and inclusive education, identify perceived challenges and support, and explore teachers' expectations of inclusive policies. The benefits of this study include providing practical information for the development of teacher training strategies, improving inclusive education policies, and contributing theoretically to the understanding of the dynamics of perception in educational settings. This study is limited to the perceptions of teachers in one inclusive school, without discussing student learning outcomes or other external factors.

METHODS

The type of research used in this study is descriptive qualitative research, in which the data collected consists of words and sentences, not numbers. According to Abubakar (2021: 7), qualitative research focuses on collecting data in verbal form to describe and understand phenomena in depth. The main focus of this study is to describe teachers' perceptions of the learning process of children with special needs in inclusive schools, so that the results are in the form of an in-depth description of how teachers view and experience these phenomena in the context of actual learning, based on postpositivism philosophy (Sugiyono, 2013; Abubakar, 2021). In this approach, the researcher acts as the main tool for collecting and analyzing data directly.

This research was conducted over three months during the odd semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, using a single case design for in-depth analysis of one main object, with primary data sources in the form of direct interviews and secondary data from documents, images, and recordings that enriched the context of social phenomena (Sarwono, 2006 in Kusumastuti and Khoiron, 2019). The data collection technique was inductive, meaning that the main focus was on understanding the meaning and context of the phenomenon, rather than seeking generalizations or universally applicable results. Data collection techniques included non-participatory observation for objectivity, closed structured interviews for the exchange of relevant information, and documentation as a supplement for fact verification. Meanwhile, validation tests through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, producing a realistic and accountable picture of teachers' experiences in the context of inclusive education (Murdiyanto, 2020).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Based on data analysis, teachers' perceptions of children with special needs evolved from negative stereotypes to empathy through direct interaction. The main themes include: (1) Understanding about children with special needs and inclusion;

(2) The influences of children with special need on the learning process and teaching; (3) Training and teaching methods; (4) Personal experiences and obstacle; and (5) The role of teachers and policy expectations.

The discussion of the research results was conducted by integrating empirical findings from the case study at SD GMIM Kayawu Tomohon with Jalaluddin Rakhmat's (2018) theoretical framework on perception in Communication Psychology, which explains perception as a subjective process involving personal experiences, social stereotypes, and communicative interactions. This analysis also compares the findings with related literature and explores practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for the development of inclusive education in Indonesia. Interviews with seven teachers at SD GMIM Kayawu, Tomohon, revealed their perceptions of children with special needs in inclusive education. The analysis is based on 15 questions, grouped into 5 main themes, supported by direct quotes, observations, and triangulation. The discussion integrates Jalaluddin Rakhmat's (2018) theory of perception, highlighting the evolution of perceptions from negative stereotypes to empathy through experience, with internal (experience, background) and external (school support) factors influencing this. The findings indicate practical challenges such as a lack of training and facilities, as well as expectations for policy improvements.

1. Understanding about Children with Special Needs and Inclusion

This theme highlights how teachers understand the terms special needs children and inclusive schools, which form the main foundation for their perceptions. Through question 1 ("How do you understand special needs children in inclusive schools? What do you think inclusive schools are?") and question 2 ("Where did you get your information about special needs children? What do you think special needs children are?"). In theme 1, these perceptions show that teachers see inclusion as a social commitment to equality, but also as a practical challenge, as expressed by Mrs. L (5th grade teacher) that inclusion is "not easy" because it involves appropriate learning, a supportive environment, and effective communication. The majority of teachers also gained knowledge about children with special needs through daily observation of student behavior, rather than from formal training. Mr. A stated that he learned through "observing their daily behavior," and Ms. L (5th grade teacher) only realized it when she "saw characteristics that were different from their peers." External sources such as the internet and social media were also used for verification. Mrs. R searched the internet after noticing unusual behavior, and Mrs. L (2nd grade teacher) used social media to confirm that the student was a student with special needs. This shows that teachers often learn independently due to a lack of access to formal training.

2. The Influences of Children with Special Need on the Learning Process and Teaching

This theme explores the ability of children with special needs to integrate with regular students and its impact on learning. Through question 3 ("Can students with special needs work together in class with regular students?"), question 5 ("Will the presence of students with special needs students in inclusive education disrupt the teaching and learning process in the classroom?"), and question 8 ("Can the presence of students with special needs improve the social skills of regular students?"). The main conclusion of this theme is that teachers' views on the impact

of the presence of children with special needs on classroom dynamics tend to emphasize negative aspects, such as disruption in the learning process, even though there are positive opportunities to shape the character of regular students through inclusive interactions. This is in line with the perception theory proposed by Jalaluddin Rakhmat (2018), which states that individuals' direct experiences greatly influence their attribution or assessment processes, whereby the practical challenges of managing a classroom actually reinforce negative preconceptions about children with special needs. These findings underscore the urgency of developing more effective classroom management strategies, including training programs for teachers in differentiated learning approaches tailored to the diverse needs of students, as well as the provision of additional support such as assistants or special resources, so that the implementation of inclusive education can run optimally without sacrificing the quality of teaching and learning progress for all students in the classroom.

3. Training and Teaching Methods

This theme discusses teacher preparation and teaching strategies for children with special needs. Questions 4 ("Have you ever participated in training or socialization about special needs education?"), 6 ("In your opinion, what are effective teaching methods for children with special needs?"), and 7 ("Do you find it easy or difficult to teach children with special needs?"). In their role as a teachers, teachers experience real difficulties in balancing their attention and resources between children with special needs and other students, which often results in neglect or a lack of optimal handling of the needs of children with special needs, because the demands of managing the class as a whole become the top priority. For example, Ms. L, who serves as a 5th grade teacher, clearly expressed her views: "As a homeroom teacher, I find it difficult because I am not an expert in that. Even though I have tried to understand their needs, I still cannot do so optimally because there are other students that I have to pay attention to." This statement accurately illustrates the classic dilemma in managing teachers' time and energy, where efforts to maintain focus on the dynamics of the class as a whole often sacrifice meeting the needs of individual students with special needs who require a special and more personalized approach. Teachers find it difficult to apply adaptive or adjustment methods because they are not experts in students with special needs and lack information. This perception highlights that simple methods (based on instant observation) are not optimal, and the lack of specialization makes teachers feel challenged.

4. Personal Experiences and Obstacle

This theme highlights direct experiences and practical obstacles. Questions 9 ("What is your personal experience teaching children with special needs?"), 11 ("What obstacles are still encountered in implementing inclusive education?"), 12 ("Do school facilities and infrastructure support the needs of children with special needs?"), and 13 ("What role do you think facilities and infrastructure play in helping children with special needs learn?"). Based on the results of interviews related to theme 4, it can be concluded that the experiences of all teachers are similar, in that they find it difficult to manage and balance the two types of

children's needs simultaneously in one class. Ultimately, the main obstacle that arises is the absence of special assistant teachers for children with special needs, which makes the inclusive education process even more challenging.

5. The Role of Teachers and Policy Expectations

This theme focuses on the internal role of teachers and external expectations. Questions 10 ("In your opinion, does the educational background of teachers influence their ability to teach children with special needs?"), 14 ("How do you, as a teacher, view the success of inclusive education in schools?"), and 14 ("What are your expectations of school policies regarding the inclusive education of children with special needs?"). From this theme, it can be concluded that teachers acknowledge their responsibility in inclusive education, but feel unprepared without external support such as training and strong school policies. This perception reflects an awareness of the equal rights of children with special needs, with the hope that policy interventions (special teachers, facilities) will revise negative attributions and encourage effective inclusion, in line with Jalaluddin Rakhmat's (2018) perception theory, which emphasizes the role of external support in changing perceptions.

Theoretically, the findings of this study confirm that teachers' perceptions of children with special needs are not static, but rather develop through a dynamic process influenced by internal and external factors. Jalaluddin Rakhmat (2018) describes perception as the result of interaction between external stimuli (such as the behavior of children with special needs) and an individual's internal cognitive processes, in which initial stereotypes can be revised through direct experience. In this context, teachers' perceptions were initially dominated by negative stereotypes of students with special needs as "different children" or "sources of disruption," which is consistent with Rakhmat's view that social stereotypes often arise from superficial observations without deep context. However, through continuous interaction in inclusive classrooms, these stereotypes evolved into empathy, where teachers began to understand children with special needs as individuals with unique potential, not just as a burden. This is reflected in the statements of informants such as Mrs. L (5th grade teacher), who initially saw children with special needs as children with "different characteristics," but later recognized their social benefits in building empathy among regular students.

Internal factors that influence perception, such as personal experience and educational background, play a crucial role in this process. Teachers with more teaching experience (Ms. L with 32 years of experience) tend to show a more positive evolution of perception, as direct experience allows them to overcome initial biases and develop adaptive strategies. Conversely, novice teachers such as Ms. L (2nd grade teacher) often feel confused and frustrated, which reinforces negative perceptions. Rakhmat (2018) explains that personal experience acts as a cognitive filter that shapes attributions, where positive experiences (such as successfully integrating students with special needs) encourage constructive internal attributions, while negative experiences (such as behavioral disturbances) can reinforce external stereotypes. Educational background also has an influence; teachers without special education specializations often feel incompetent, which is in line with the finding that the majority of informants rely on daily observations

rather than formal knowledge, making their perceptions more subjective and prone to bias.

External factors, such as school support and education policy, also shape teachers' perceptions. The lack of facilities and training at SD GMIM Kayawu exacerbates the challenges, making teachers feel burdened and worsening their perceptions of inclusion. Rakhmat (2018) emphasizes that communicative interaction with the external environment, such as support from schools or colleagues, can revise perceptions. In this study, the absence of special assistant teachers and adaptive facilities made teachers feel challenged, which was reflected in their expectations for improved policy support. This shows that perceptions are not only subjective but also influenced by social and structural contexts, where unequal access to education for children with special needs reinforces teachers' frustration.

Compared to related literature, these findings are in line with the study by D'Alonzo et al. (1996), which found that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion can be improved through education and direct experience, reducing negative stereotypes and increasing empathy. Research by Widodo et al. (2017) also shows that teachers' perceptions in inclusive schools are often influenced by professional readiness, where a lack of training reinforces practical challenges. However, unlike that study, this research emphasizes the evolution of perceptions from stereotypes to empathy in the context of regular schools without special assistants, highlighting the urgency of early intervention to prevent initial bias. In Indonesia, Kadir's (2015) study on the implementation of inclusive schools shows similar obstacles, such as a lack of human resources, which is reinforced by these findings. Overall, these results contribute to the literature by showing that teachers' perceptions can be changed through interaction, but require systemic support for sustainability.

The practical implications of this study include recommendations for improving teacher training, providing adaptive facilities, and reforming inclusion policies. Teachers need to be trained in differentiated learning methods to accommodate students with special needs without neglecting regular students, as suggested by Hallahan and Kauffman (2009). Inclusive schools such as SD GMIM Kayawu must be equipped with special assistant teachers and learning aids to reduce the burden on regular teachers. At the policy level, the government needs to strengthen inclusion regulations through budget allocations for ongoing training and facilities, in accordance with Indonesia Law No. 20 of 2003. This will not only increase the effectiveness of inclusion but also promote educational equality for children with disabilities.

However, this study has limitations, such as its focus on a single school, which limits its generalizability, and the potential for subjective bias in the qualitative data. Triangulation helps reduce bias, but further research with a larger sample is needed for validation. Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of understanding teachers' perceptions as the foundation for successful inclusive education, with the hope of encouraging positive change in the field of special education in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study traces the evolutionary process of non-special education teachers' perceptions of children with special needs at SD GMIM Kayawu, which initially were dominated by negative stereotypes and gradually developed into a more empathetic understanding. This change occurred through direct interaction between teachers and children with special needs in the classroom environment, where perceptions developed through continuous experience and communication. This process was influenced by internal factors, such as teachers' personal experiences, knowledge, and emotional readiness, as well as external factors such as school support, policies, and facilities provided. However, research has found that the lack of specialized training for teachers and limited facilities are significant challenges that hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education. Therefore, it is recommended that inclusive education be supported by continuous training programs for teachers, the provision of adequate support facilities, and the implementation of strong and clear inclusion policies, in order to create a fair education system that is able to provide optimal learning access for all students, especially children with special needs. Based on the research results, teachers' perceptions of children with special needs in inclusive schools show significant variation, mainly influenced by direct experience, initial stereotypes, and practical daily challenges. From the interview analysis, several main themes emerged as follows:

Understanding about Children with Special Needs and Inclusion: Teachers generally view inclusion as an education system that is open to all children without discrimination, but their understanding of children with special needs is more often based on observations of daily behavior or external sources such as the internet. Initial stereotypes that view children with special needs as "different children" gradually evolve into a deeper and more nuanced understanding through direct interaction in the classroom.

The Influences of Children with Special Need on the Learning Process and Teaching: Most teachers consider the presence of students with disabilities to be a potential distraction, such as uncontrolled behavior that disrupts the rhythm of classroom learning. However, a small number of teachers recognize the positive benefits, including increased empathy and social skills among regular students. This experience indicates that initial negative perceptions can shift to positive views as interactions continue.

Training and Teaching Methods: Teachers often face obstacles due to limited facilities, lack of specialized training, and teaching methods that have not been adapted. Simple approaches based on spontaneous observation tend to be ineffective, while children with special needs are often marginalized amid the burden of teaching dozens of regular students. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of assistant teachers, which causes an imbalance in overall classroom management.

Personal Experiences and Obstacle: All teachers interviewed acknowledged the great difficulty of teaching children with special needs in regular classes, because the main task of managing the class as a whole conflicts with the unique needs of children with special needs, who require a special approach, often causing them to be neglected amid the burden of dozens of regular students. Without adequate

facilities, assistant teachers, or specific information, even simple methods based on instant observation are not optimal, resulting in an uneven distribution of time and energy. Despite their efforts, the lack of expertise and specialization in SEN causes the learning process to be less than optimal, leading to an imbalance in the fulfillment of students' rights. Overall, these findings highlight the urgency of training, facility support, and adaptive methods to overcome teachers' perceptions of difficulty and achieve effective inclusion.

The Role of Teachers and Policy Expectations: The biggest obstacle is the lack of equitable access to optimal education for children with special needs, which is caused by the absence of adaptive curriculum and special educators. Teachers hope that intensive training, the provision of adequate facilities, and the recruitment of teachers with special education backgrounds will improve the effectiveness of inclusion programs.

Overall, teachers' perceptions have evolved from negative stereotypes to empathy through direct experience, although practical obstacles such as a lack of systemic support often exacerbate these difficulties. These findings directly address the research question, namely that teachers' perceptions play a crucial role in the success of inclusion, with internal factors (such as experience and personal background) and external factors (such as school facilities and policies) as the main drivers of change.

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