

Research Article

Inclusive Education: Typically Developing Student's Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns

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ORCIDIftita Rahmi: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3218-7741>**Abstract.**

Politeknik Negeri Jakarta (PNJ) is a prominent higher education institution in Indonesia that extends its educational services to students with special educational needs (SEN). However, the existing educational practices at PNJ exhibit a partial inclusivity model, whereby SEN students are segregated into separate classes and study programs distinct from their typically developing (TD) peers. The sentiments, attitudes, and concerns of TD students play a pivotal role in the overall success of inclusive education (IE) initiatives. This study seeks to investigate the above regarding IE within the context of PNJ. The study encompassed a sample of 400 students from PNJ, employing a quantitative methodology with a descriptive and correlational non-experimental approach. The results unveiled that a majority of the participants held a moderate level of sentiments, attitudes, and concerns toward inclusive education. Notably, factors such as direct contact with persons with disabilities (PwD), knowledge about PwD, and confidence levels in interacting with them emerged as influential determinants in shaping sentiments, attitudes, and concerns related to IE. This research offers valuable insights into the perceptions of TD students concerning IE at PNJ, which can inform policy recommendations aimed at enhancing educational provisions for SEN students. The findings underscore the importance of fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational environment, promoting positive attitudes, and addressing concerns to facilitate the successful implementation of inclusive education practices within the institution.

Keywords: inclusive education, sentiments, attitudes, concerns, typically developing students, special educational needs students

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1. Introduction

The international recognition of education as a fundamental human right encompasses persons with disabilities (PwD) who require specialized support. Over the past two decades, philosophy and regulations regarding education of PwD have evolved. Many nations now employ integrated educational programs, transitioning into inclusive education. This approach prioritizes adapting educational environments to meet special

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educational needs (SEN) students' rather than requiring them to adapt to mainstream schools. Inclusive education is endorsed by the United Nations Convention on Human Rights (2007), the Salamanca Statement, and Indonesian Law Number 8 of 2016, solidifying its legal recognition [1–3]. The definition of inclusive education lacks universal consensus [4]. The Salamanca Conference in 1994 characterized it as a process addressing diverse student needs through content, curriculum, and strategy adaptations [4]. Madesh's review identified inclusive education as a program fostering an inclusive environment where curricula are adaptable to meet all students' needs, irrespective of their abilities [5].

Challenges persist in the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesian higher education. A negative stigma associated with PwD continues to influence inclusive education practices [6]. Diverse attitudes toward implementation, concerns about stakeholders' capacity, inadequate training, limited access to educational resources, and insufficient government and parental support remain barriers to successful inclusive education implementation [6]. Stakeholder attitudes, including those of typically developing (TD) students are crucial for the success and social climate in institutions practicing inclusive education [7]. TD students' acceptance of SEN peers is pivotal, impacting their stance on inclusive education. Inclusive education benefits both SEN and TD students. SEN students with peer support experience improved social interaction and academic engagement [8]. TD peers also gain advocacy and support skills, deeper understanding of inclusion, improved attitudes toward SEN students, and new friendships [9]. Oh-Young & Filler's meta-analysis shows that more integrated settings yield better academic and social outcomes for SEN students and emphasize individualized placement based on student needs [10].

Inclusive education's success involves various key stakeholders, including teachers, parents, local authorities, TD students, and SEN students. Bennett et al. highlight students as significantly impacted by inclusive education [5]. A systematic review by Freer on students' attitudes towards disability reveals that TD students' attitudes influence peer acceptance or rejection, affecting SEN students' sense of inclusion in school [6]. Moreover, it suggests that negative attitudes about disabilities pose challenges to SEN students' social integration, contradicting inclusive education. Messiou's studies also underscore the student's pivotal role in promoting and implementing inclusive education [7–9].

Politeknik Negeri Jakarta (PNJ) is one of Indonesian higher education institution that serves students with SEN. However, PNJ's current practices segregate SEN students

from TD peers, drawing criticism from multiple stakeholders, including the government. To transition towards inclusive education, it is crucial to understand the attitudes of the academic community, particularly TD students, regarding inclusive education. TD students significantly influence inclusive education's success. Several studies require that their perspectives and experiences must be explored [7, 9, 10]. This study aims to investigate TD students' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns regarding inclusive education at Politeknik Negeri Jakarta. The study has two main objectives: first, to evaluate TD students' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns about inclusive education, and second, to identify factors influencing these sentiments and attitudes.

2. Methods

This research is a quantitative research that aims to determine the sentiments, attitudes, and concerns of TD students towards the implementation of inclusive higher education in PNJ.

2.1. Participants

The participants of this study were students who attended PNJ. The questionnaire was administered to the students via email. Data from 400 participants were included in the statistical analysis.

Table 1 shows the proportion between male and female participants was nearly 1:1 with the majority being below 20 years old (N = 243) and having no intensive interaction with PwD (N = 349). Nearly 79% of the participants have none to average knowledge about disability policy, and more than 63% of the participants have none to average confidence in interacting with PwD.

2.2. Measures

The measuring tool used in this study is the Sentiment, Attitude, and Concern towards Inclusive Education, Revised Version (SACIE-R) scale [11]. The researchers adapted the SACIE-R scale into Indonesian. The SACIE-R scale consists of three dimensions, namely Sentiment, Attitude, and Concern. This scale consists of 24 items divided into two parts, namely the demographic information section of participants, and questions about participants' attitudes towards inclusive education in the form of a Likert scale with

TABLE 1: Demographic data of the participants (N = 400).

Demographic	Frecuency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	207	51.75%
Female	193	48.25%
Age		
≤ 20 year	243	60.75%
21-25 year	152	38%
26-30 year	2	0.5%
≥ 30 year	3	0.75%
Intensive interaction with PwD		
Yes	51	12.75%
No	349	87.25%
Academic interactions with PwD		
Never	188	47%
1-5 times	176	44%
more than 5 times	36	9%
Training or seminar about how to interact with PwD		
Never	292	73%
1-5 times	103	25.75%
more than 5 times	5	1.25%
Level of knowledge about disability		
None	58	14.5%
Poor	123	30.75%
Average	134	33.5%
Good	57	14.25%
Very good	28	7%
Level of confidence in interacting with PwD		
Very low	21	5.25%
Low	67	16.75%
Average	167	41.75%
High	100	25%
Very High	45	11.25%

4 levels (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree). The original scale of SACIE-R has a reliability coefficient $\alpha = 0.74$. This scale was adapted to

adjust the subject of this study. The adapted scale consists of 24 items, has a reliability coefficient $\alpha = 0.709$.

2.3. Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics was used for the analysis of the collected data. Descriptive statistics (mean & standard deviation) were used to evaluate TD students' concerns and sentiments towards SENS and attitudes towards inclusion. Independent groups t-test was conducted to evaluate significant differences in TD students' concern and sentiments towards SEN as well as attitudes toward inclusion, in terms of gender and interaction with PwD. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare means between independent groups (i.e., groups based on interaction with PwD in the academic setting and seminar). Finally, Pearson Correlation was used to investigate the relationship between the level of knowledge and confidence in interacting with PwD with attitudes towards inclusive education, and concern and sentiment towards SEN.

3. Results

The result of this study in Table 2 shows that the majority of the participants have moderate levels of sentiments (N = 295), attitudes (N = 291), and concerns (N = 319) toward inclusive education. Even if the participants show moderate levels of sentiments, attitudes, and concerns toward inclusive education, Table 3 demonstrates that they tend to have moderate to high scores regarding sentiments, attitudes, and concerns toward inclusive education.

3.1. Sentiments

Regarding sentiments, Table 2 shows that most of the participants have a moderate level of sentiment towards disabilities. Findings revealed that participants would feel terrible if they had a disability (M = 2.62, SD = 0.962) and think that being someone who has a disability is very unpleasant (M = 2.87, SD = 0.953). They are not scared to interact with SEN (M = 1.78, SD = 0.814), do not tend to shorten their interactions with PwD (M = 2.44, SD = 0.847), and do not have difficulty overcoming their shock when meeting PwD with a severe disability (M = 2.23, SD = 0.886). Comparative analysis indicates that there is no significant difference between male and female participants' sentiments towards

TABLE 2: Level of sentiments, attitudes, and concerns of the participants.

Level of sentiment	N	Percentage
High	35	8.75%
Moderate	295	73.75%
Low	70	17.5%
Level of attitude		
High	32	8%
Moderate	291	72.75%
Low	77	19.25%
Level of concern		
High	41	10.25%
Moderate	319	79.75%
Low	40	10%

TABLE 3: Descriptive statistics of each item (N=400).

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
S1	2.878	.953
S2	2.443	.847
S3	2.623	.962
S4	1.780	.814
S5	2.233	.886
A1	2.275	.840
A2	2.620	.795
A3	2.335	.899
A4	2.533	.778
A5	2.068	.818
C1	2.725	.985
C2	2.983	.776
C3	2.180	.848
C4	1.853	.766
C5	2.925	.822

Note: Mean response range 1 (strongly agree), 2 (agree), 3 (disagree), to 4 (strongly disagree).

disability. On the other hand, there is a significant difference in sentiment between the participants who had a routine interaction with PwD and the participants who did not have a routine interaction ($t = 3.083, p < 0.05$).

3.2. Attitudes

The majority of the participants have a moderate level of attitude towards inclusion. The participants of this study think that SEN students who have Individual Educational Programs (IEP; $M = 2.067$, $SD = 0.818$), students with sensory impairment ($M = 2.335$, $SD = 0.899$), and students with communication disorder ($M = 2.275$, $SD = 0.840$) could be placed in a TD student's classroom. However, they seem more cautious with the SEN students with attention problems ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 0.795$) and intellectual disabilities ($M = 2.532$, $SD = 0.778$). There is no difference between males and females in terms of attitude towards persons with disabilities. In addition, there is also no difference in attitude between participants who interacted regularly with PwD and participants who did not interact regularly with people with disabilities.

3.3. Concerns

According to the results, participants are worried that their SEN classmates will not be accepted by the rest of the class ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 0.985$). They also think that they will have difficulties giving an appropriate response ($M = 2.9298$, $SD = 0.776$) and do not have the capability and skill ($M = 2.92292$, $SD = 0.822$) to interact with SEN peers in inclusive class. On the other hand, the participants believe that having SEN in the classroom will not bother them. They also feel that having SEN in class will not interfere with the learning process. There is a significant difference between male and female students about concern toward implementing inclusive education in PNJ ($t = 2.45$, $p < 0.05$), where the female students have greater concern than the male ones. Moreover, the participants who have a routine interaction with PwD have lower concerns than the ones who do not have a routine interaction with PwD ($t = 3.089$, $p < 0.05$).

The result of the correlational analysis on Table 4 shows that there is a significant positive relationship between attitude towards inclusion, sentiment about disability, and concern about inclusive education. It means the higher the concern about inclusion, the higher the sentiment about disability ($r = 0.601$, $p < 0.01$), and the higher the attitude toward inclusivity ($r = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$).

What stands out from these results is a significant negative correlation between knowledge and concern ($r = -0.139$, $p < 0.01$), sentiment ($r = -0.142$, $p < 0.01$), and attitude ($r = -0.179$, $p < 0.01$). It means that the more you know about disability, the less you have concern, sentiment, and attitude towards inclusive education. Another interesting

TABLE 4: Correlation on each factor.

	Regular interaction	Concerns	Sentiments	Attitudes	Knowledge	Confidence
Regular Interaction	1	-.176**	-.171**	-.051	.300**	.277**
Concerns		1	.601**	.115*	-.139**	-.210**
Sentiments			1	.081	-.142**	-.275**
Attitudes				1	-.179**	-.183**
Knowledge					1	.465**
Confidence						1

Note: N=400, *p<0,05, **p<0,01

finding is a significant negative relation between confidence level and concern ($r = -0.210$, $p < 0.01$), sentiment ($r = -0.27575$, $p < 0.01$), and attitude ($r = 0.1833$, $p < 0.01$), which means the more have confidence in interacting with PwD, the less you have concern, sentiment, and attitude towards inclusive education.

This result also reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between the level of knowledge about disability and the level of confidence in interacting with PwD ($r = 0.465$, $p < 0.01$). The higher a person’s knowledge of people with disabilities, the more confident they are in interacting with them. Other interesting results show a positive relationship between interaction and knowledge ($r = 0.3$, $p < 0.01$) and confidence level ($r = 0.277$, $p < 0.01$). It indicates that the more someone interacts with PwD, the more they have knowledge about them and have more confidence in interacting with them.

4. Discussion

This study set out with the aim of assessing the sentiments, attitudes, and concerns TD students towards inclusive education and examining the other factors such as gender, contact, knowledge, and confidence that could influence their sentiments, attitudes, and concerns. Numerous attempts to implement inclusive education persist with ongoing challenges. Conversely, prior research confirms the positive impact of

inclusive education on academic and professional outcomes, student well-being, and the learning environment [12–14].

Regarding the first aim, most of the participants have moderate level of sentiments, attitude, and concerns towards inclusive education. This finding also shows that the participants have concerns about the acceptability and communication with SEN students. This finding implies that the majority of the participants still hesitate to be in the same class as SEN students. They also need to improve their attitude towards students with attention problems and intellectual disabilities. There are several possible explanations for this result that will be rationalized in the section below.

In respect of the second aim, focusing on gender-specific differences, the results reveal statistically significant disparities among students solely in the concern dimension, with women displaying higher levels. However, no differences were observed between males and females in the sentiments and attitudes dimensions. This outcome is inconsistent to previous studies [6, 10, 15–17] which have found that female students have more positive attitudes towards disability compared to male ones.

In this study, the result shows that regular interaction with persons with disabilities has a positive impact on students' concerns and sentiments. Students who have routine interaction with PwD have lower concerns and sentiments toward inclusive education. However, surprisingly this study found that contact with PwD does not have a positive relation to attitude dimension. This result is inconsistent with earlier studies that found that the more contact someone has with a disability, the better their attitude towards them [16–20]. The result of this study implies that if a student knows someone with disabilities or has a friend or family member with disabilities, he/she will have less concern about sharing a class with SEN students and have fewer sentiments about inclusive education. One way to increase the interaction between TD students and their SEN peers is by implementing inclusive education. According to several studies, inclusive education is linked to students' having more favorable attitudes toward disabilities [21–23]. Schwab discovered that to increase positive attitudes toward disability, having SEN students in the class is not enough; they also have to do an activity together [10].

Another finding that stands out from the results reported earlier is the correlation between knowledge about disabilities and sentiments, attitudes, and concerns. This study found that the more you know about disability, the less you have concern, sentiment, and negative attitude toward inclusive education. There is inconsistent previous research regarding this matter. A study by Al-Kandari reported that knowledge

about disability was associated with more favorable attitudes [24]. Nevertheless, de Boer et al. claimed that knowledge only has a modest impact on students' attitudes toward disabilities [25]. Additionally, Lee and Shin discovered that students with and without knowledge about disabilities did not exhibit different attitudes [26]. A possible explanation for these findings may be different levels of knowledge of disabilities. A prior study classified three different levels of knowledge about disabilities, namely exposure, experience, and ownership [27]. Learning about disabilities only addresses the exposure level of knowledge. To increase your knowledge, you should be experiencing and advocating for disability.

This study found that the confidence level in interacting with disabilities has a negative correlation with concerns, sentiments, and attitudes towards inclusive education. This means the more you have confidence, the less you have sentiments, negative attitudes, and concerns towards inclusive education. Previous research has not discussed much about the relationship between confidence level and sentiments, attitudes, and concerns towards inclusive education, but many studies discuss self-efficacy. A study by Hellmich and Loeper discovered that TD students' self-efficacy for interacting with SEN peers was positively associated with their attitudes toward disability [20].

Another interesting finding reported earlier is the relationship between knowledge of disabilities and confidence level in interacting with them. Lower concerns, sentiments, and negative attitudes about inclusive education might occur because TD's students do not know how to react, interact with, and communicate with SEN peers. Thus, they do not have the confidence to do so. This result is in contrast with Bowlin et al. research, which found that attitudes, but not knowledge, significantly predicted a sense of efficacy [28]. Importantly, the correlation analysis found that regular interaction is positively associated with the knowledge and confidence level of the TD students. This finding has some parallels with some previous studies, which demonstrated that interacting with SEN peers influenced attitudes toward them positively, deepened understanding of diversity, and increased confidence in creating inclusive classrooms [29, 30].

5. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the perceptions and understandings of TD students about implementing inclusive education at Politeknik Negeri Jakarta. The results show that, in general, TD students have moderate levels of sentiments, attitudes, and concerns towards inclusive education. Contact with SEN students play a bigger role in influencing

TD peers' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns towards inclusive education. The most important findings are the importance of knowledge about disabilities and confidence in interacting with SEN peers in fostering inclusive learning environments.

The study's practical implications include the following: Institutions can enhance TD students' awareness of inclusive education by offering seminars, classes, or additional courses on the subject. Researchers recommend the integration of SEN students with TD peers in the same class to promote positive attitudes and build TD students' confidence in interacting with SEN peers, aligning with Naraiian's proposal to create more opportunities for peer interactions [31]. Additionally, to mitigate educational and social marginalization of disabled students, institutions should begin by dispelling outdated stereotypes about inclusive education, recognizing its complexity and the necessity of various policies and legislations.

This study's limitations include the exclusive reliance on data from TD students for sentiments, attitudes, and concerns about inclusive education, suggesting that incorporating perspectives from students with SEN might yield different insights. Moreover, the research focused on an institution with preexisting segregation between TD students and SEN peers, potentially impacting TD students' perceptions of and comprehension regarding inclusive education. Future research avenues encompass investigating additional psychological determinants like empathy, self-efficacy, mindset, and personality, as these variables could exert unique effects or act as mediators between social interaction and attitudes toward inclusive education. Furthermore, exploring the roles of teachers, educators, and other stakeholders in shaping students' perceptions and understanding of inclusive education, as well as the influence of regional school policies on students' justifications for inclusive education, warrant further inquiry.

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