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Bridging Inclusive Education in Multicultural Settings: A Data-Driven Approach in Analyzing Elementary Student Attitudes Toward Children with Special Needs

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate elementary school children's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural skill towards handicapped children (their diffable classmates) through their writing and reading skills. This research included 30 students aged 11–13 from a district. The research data was acquired with the Chedoke-McMaster Attitudes Towards Children with Handicaps (CATCH) scale for children. This research was distinguished by its innovative processing of qualitative data through a quantitative lens, employing topic modelling techniques with Python utilizing LDA-mallet within the frameworks of Google Collab and Excel applications. The quantitative data of this research was interpreted with descriptive quantitative methods, as a result, a quantitative research design with data triangulation was used in this study. Based on their interactions with their diffable friends and the presence of impaired persons in their surroundings, students' views towards their friends with disabilities were markedly disparate. Female pupils had greater proficiency in empathy skills toward their diffable classmates. We identified a substantial and positive correlation between students' views towards diffable friends and their cognitive and emotional empathy skills. The "involvement and acceptance" and "avoidance" sub-dimensions of the attitude scale positively influenced empathy abilities, whereas the 'pity' sub-dimension had a little negative impact on empathy skills. This research also concluded that inclusive education could become exclusive in the absence of narrative expanse for everyone. Respecting differences had the potential to cause polarization. Consequently, the awareness of each individual had become essential. Writing and reading skills could serve as a media for teachers to reflect, and for students to acquire knowledges and skills, and other benefits.

Keywords: *Special needs children, handicapped children, attitude, writing skill, elementary student, topic-modeling*

INTRODUCTION

Educational and psychological analyses entail significant progress in behavioral science within contemporary society, providing vital and considerable improvements

over previous researches. The appropriate use of writing assessments may lead to better informed needs about persons and programs than would occur in their absence, and can also provide greater and more fair access to education and career opportunities (Gronlund et al., 1995; Gronlund & Waugh, 2013; Norman Edward Gronlund, 1977). Language skill training activities in learning Indonesian can assist various stakeholders in analyzing and contributing to the attainment of our educational objectives. Numerous objectives can be achieved through the development of writing proficiency (Xu et al., 2024). Writing enables students to articulate their thoughts and emotions, provides teachers with a chance for introspection, and fosters mutual awareness and supportiveness (Ke et al., 2024; Ohta et al., 2023). Consequently, this writing activity can enhance educational quality and personal development by fostering improved attitudes.

Attitudes are shaped by the learning process as a means of knowledge transmission. Attitudes comprise thoughts, ideas, emotions, and behaviours directed towards an individual, object, or circumstance (Fu et al., 2022). Individuals uniquely exhibit attitudes, understanding, and skills as a result of their diverse backgrounds, encompassing social, religious, cultural, gender, political, and educational factors (Gafur, 2022; Mustafida & Bela Dina, 2021). Attitude reflects an individual's character (Purnamasari & Wangid, 2016a, 2016b). Some elaboration above elucidated the advantages of undertaking this research. The examination of student narratives has become crucial for providing a platform for students to comprehend and interpret their responses to diversity. Additionally, this research offered advantages by fostering innovations for educators in facilitating inclusive education within the management of learning interactions in a multicultural context.

Interaction with the diversity of beliefs, opportunities, and uniqueness offered by God is associated with a more positive cognitive, behavioural, and emotional perspective on disabilities. For many years, researches already concentrated on fostering positive attitudes and comprehension regarding individuals with disabilities (Altındağ Kumaş & Sardohan Yildirim, 2024; Duka et al., 2024; Flavian, 2024). A multitude of studies and initiatives have been conducted, and various assessment tools have been created to assess attitudes towards individuals with disabilities (Çiçek Gümüş & Öncel, 2022; Freer, 2023). The knowledge and understanding garnered by researchers through diverse studies demonstrated a prevailing social inclination to respond in a nuanced manner, whether positively or negatively, to individuals, objects, or various circumstances (Al-bedaery et al., 2024; Dağlı Gökbulut et al., 2024; Jacob et al., 2025; Ke et al., 2024). This research, however, presented a divergence from earlier studies. This



study examined students' sentiments and reflections by employing both questionnaires and the sincere articulations found in their written work.

For that reason, the topics addressed in this journal were as follows: 1) Do students comprehend the circumstances of children with special needs in alignment with the objectives of inclusive classrooms in multicultural context? and 2) Does the students' attitude to children with special needs influence the implementation of inclusive classrooms as a pedagogical method for fostering a multicultural environment?

In this article, children with special needs, handicaps, and disabilities were defined as those who a) having a condition that markedly restricts one's ability to function physically, mentally, or socially; or b) exhibit markedly greater challenges in learning compared to the majority of peers of the same age; or c) possess a disability that obstructs or impedes their ability to utilize educational resources typically available to children of the same age in schools governed by the local education authority; or c) are of compulsory school age and meet the criteria outlined in (b) or (c) above, or would do so if special educational provisions were not implemented for them.

METHODS

This quantitative study was executed by administering the CATCH questionnaire to inclusive public elementary school students in Jakarta, aged 11 to 13 years (Gumus & Oncel, 2020; Rosenbaum et al., 1986). This questionnaire posits that attitudes consist of three dimensions: (a) an affective component reflecting feelings towards disabled children; (b) a behavioral intent component indicating actions a child would take with a disabled child; and (c) a cognitive component encompassing verbal beliefs about disabled children (Fishbein, 1966; Ostrom, 1969). A total of 30 children freely and randomly completed a questionnaire, shared their experiences, opinions, and emotions towards children with special needs.

The acquired data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics and topic modelling. The most recent iteration of Excel was used for descriptive statistics to analyze the outcomes of the CATCH questionnaire, which was gathered using a 1-4 Likert scale. This was used to prevent indecisive replies from students (Saha & Paul, 2023). Collaboration using the Python programming language (Saxton, 2018) and utilizing the pandas' package in conjunction with lda-mallet (Alghamdi & Alfalqi, 2015; Blei et al., 2003), was used for topic modelling to analyze by detecting the major conclusions of students' experiential narratives documented on questionnaire sheets (Morgan, 2016). The topic modeling used in this research was illustrated in Figure 1 (Abdelrazek et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024; Vayansky & Kumar, 2020).



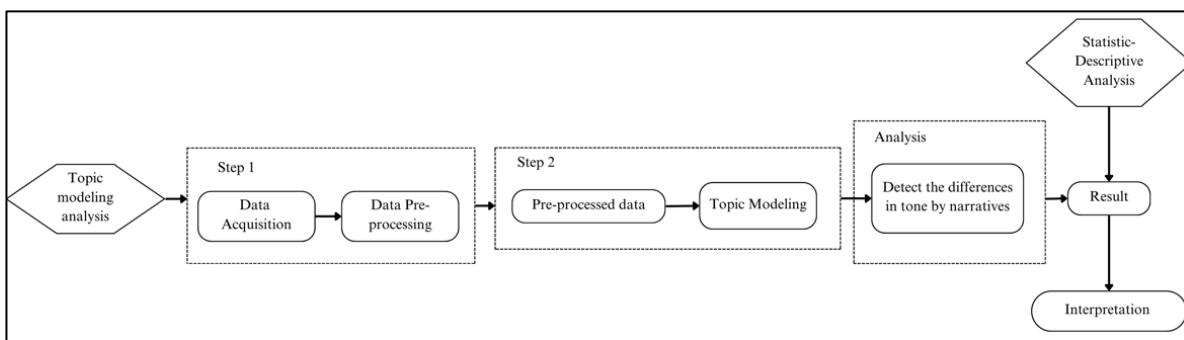


Figure 1. Data Driven Analysis in this Research

Figure 1 elucidated that topic modelling commenced with the acquisition of data subsequent to its collection in Excel. The narrative texts produced by the students had been aggregated into a corpus, poised for analysis utilising Python within the Google Collab. In order to facilitate the analysis, the procedure of text preprocessing was undertaken. The initial phase of this procedure involved fundamental data cleaning, tokenisation, the elimination of stop-words, lemmatisation, the establishment of a Ngram's model, as well as the formulation of a dictionary, corpus, and a document frequency list of terms. This methodology enabled scholars to transform the lexicon within the narrative into lowercase, eliminated stop words, punctuation, numerical figures, and non-alphabetic symbols, while also stemmed the residual text. The conventional preprocessing methods could markedly improve algorithmic performance and stabilise the stochastic inference associated with LDA. The assessment of stability in these data outcomes could be elucidated via coherence scores (Abdelrazek et al., 2023; Kherwa & Bansal, 2019).

The coherence score obtained from CV topic modelling was utilized to evaluate the internal coherence of the topic within this dataset. The coherence score for data generally spanned from 0 to 1, where elevated values signified a greater level of coherence, marked by clear and consistent topics within the data. A coherence score in topic modelling was a quantitative metric used to evaluate the semantic relatedness of words within a topic. Scores exceeding 0.4 were generally deemed acceptable; however, it was advisable to strive for higher scores, preferably 0.6 or above (Loeb et al., 2017). The coherence score data from this research was 0.804. Following tokenization, a coherence score of 0.92 was achieved.

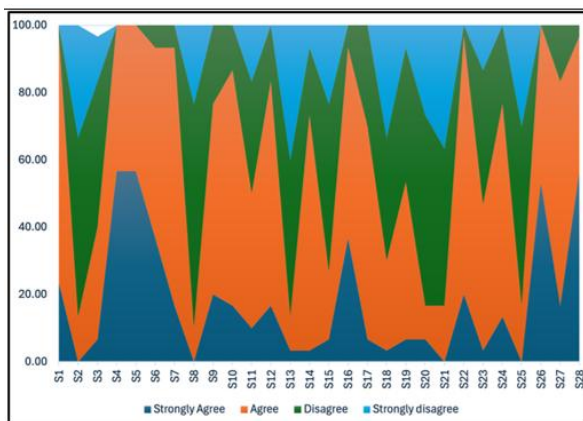
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' writing abilities as well as their reading circumstances and conditions were used in this study to employ narrative texts. The five dimensions of

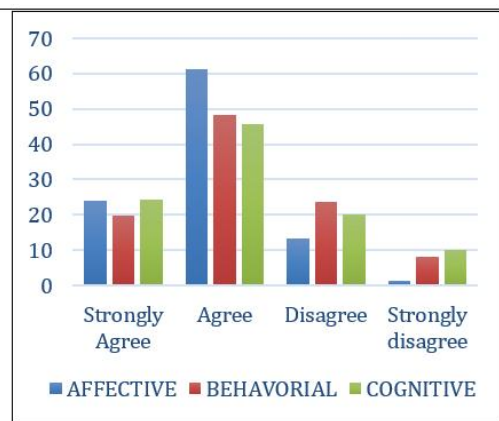


multiculturalism—content integration, knowledge construction, equitable pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and empowering school culture and social structure—introduced by Bank (2010) were then used as a framework for the analysis and discussion of these narrative texts. The term 'inclusive education' was addressed to empower educational institutions, local education authorities, and other service providers to guarantee that children who had difficulties with learning or curriculum accessibility received the help they needed (Rose & Howley, 2007). According to Hardman et al. (2017) inclusive education refers to instruction that is dedicated to giving special needs students the chance to receive support and services that are catered to their specific requirements in a general education setting.

In inclusive classrooms with a multicultural setting, two service and support focusses must be established: 1) availability of the general curriculum and 2) all-encompassing school assistance in an endeavour to fulfil the aspects of equitable pedagogy, knowledge transmission procedures, and content integration. While the support focusses are: 1) Students with special needs can be engaged and progress in the general curriculum; 2) Students can participate in all subjects; and 3) School leaders can support instruction by collaborating with general and special education resources, learning resources, and learning programs. The twelve areas of differentiation in inclusive classrooms are: content, interest, pace, access, outcomes, curriculum sequence, organisation, teacher time, teaching style, and grouping, are thus where this program can be implemented (Lewis, 1992; Lewis & Norwich, 2001). This study revealed how other students encouraged students with special needs to participate in the learning process as illustrated in graph 1 and 2. (Graph 1 and 2 are used for illustration).



Graph 1. Questionnaire's Result



Graph 2. Categorization of Questionnaire's Output

Graph 1 illustrated through S4, S5, and S26 that all students were very empathetic towards disabled children. Students showed confidence, trust, and support



for the ability of disabled children to contribute in various ways, both in groups and independently, even though they required significant assistance. The responses to the questionnaire in Graph 1 were classified into three categories: affective (statements S1, S8, S10, S12, S15, S16, S17, S20, S24, and S26), behavioural (S2, S3, S5, S7, S9, S13, S19, S21, S22, S25, and S27), and cognitive (S4, S6, S11, S14, S18, S23, and S28). This categorization was reinforced by Graph 2. Overall, the affective, cognitive, and behavioural aspects of the students were very good in understanding the conditions of children with special needs. They not only understood the limitations of children with special needs but also managed to condition themselves and even implemented the empathy they possess. In fact, in Topic 0, students realized that children with disabilities also had the potential to possess better skills than they did.

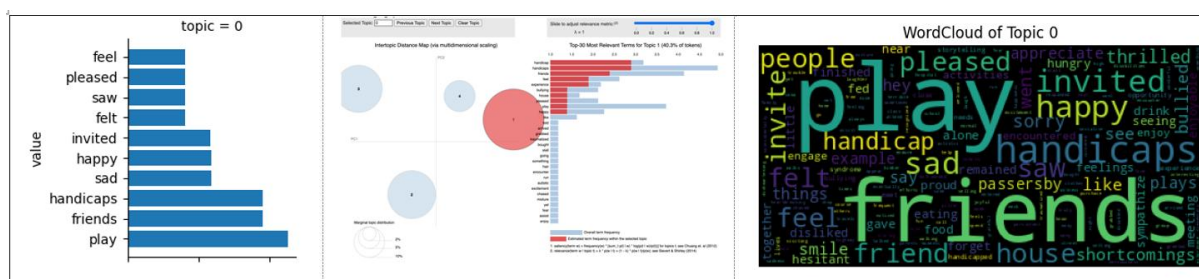


Figure 1. Topic 0

In contrast to other research projects conducted by Ediyanto et al. (2023), showing that a large number of peers and even parents were indifferent to the needs of kids with special needs, this study's narrative text (shown in Figure 3) indicated that female students were more adept at showing empathy for their classmates with special needs (Navarro-Mateu et al., 2019). This claimed that women's empathy, attention, and social avoidance were significantly associated with higher communication quality than men'. This finding were supported by research by Bianchi et al. (Bianchi et al., 2020). Therefore, inclusive education required more than just services and support.

Saya bantu. Sodara aku dia udah kelas 1 SMA
 tetapi ia belum bisa baca dari sd kelas 1.
 Setiap diajarin baca ia tidak mau. Tapi ia berusaha
 semaksimal mungkin supaya ia bisa baca tapi
 dia masih ga bisa juga, tapi ia bisa adzan.

“... My cousin is currently in the first year of high school, yet he has not been able to read since the first grade of elementary school. Whenever he is instructed in reading, he declines. He makes every effort to learn to read, but he still struggles; however, he is able to call the adhan....”

Di ulu gaya pernah sekelas dengan anak Abik dan saya pernah
 sekelompok Perasaan saya bisa saja



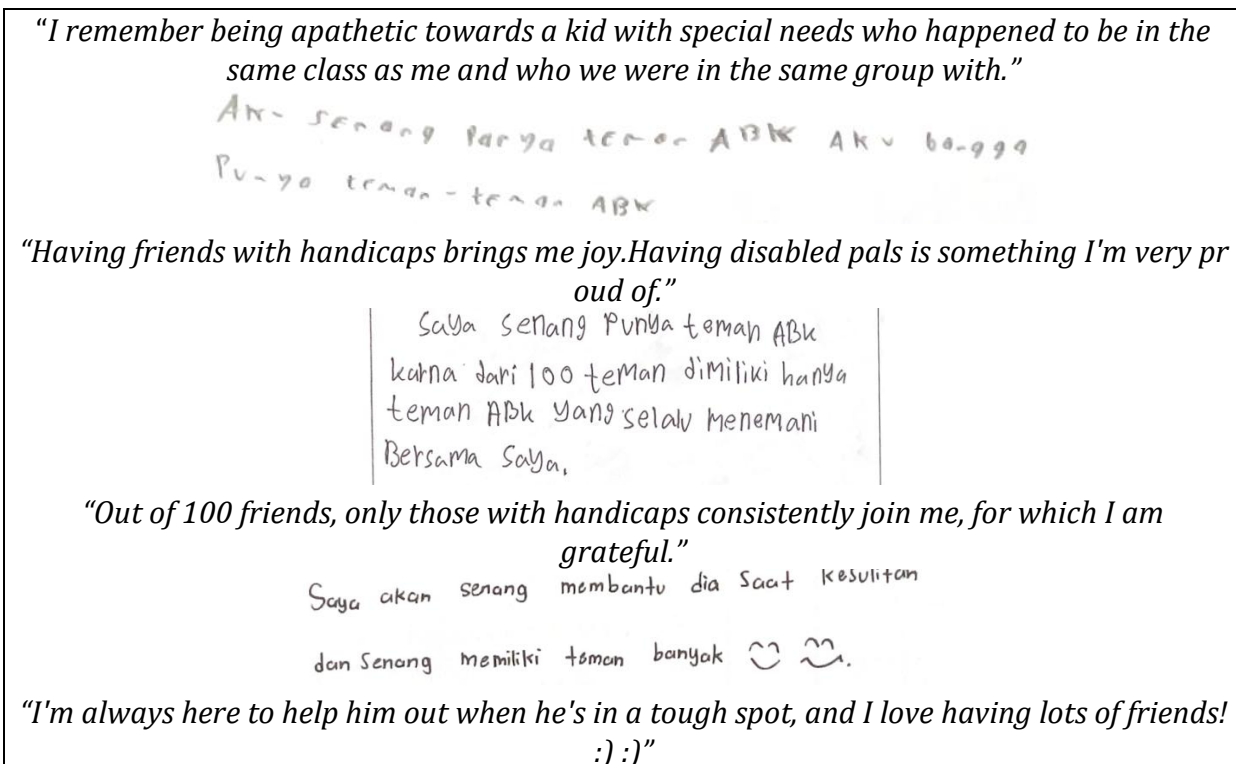


Figure 2. Students' Responses

This discussion suggested that in order to respond to the presence and involvement of students with special needs, inclusive education necessitated behavioural support in the form of character development programs, social climate development, and student mindsets. Peer awareness, which could be a powerful natural support system for students with disabilities in both academic and social settings, was the pressing need for this research (Alnahdi, 2019; Nowicki et al., 2014; Schwab, 2017). In inclusive classroom learning, the role of multiculturalism in lowering prejudice as well as the empowering school culture and social structure had to be taken into account. The attitude scale's "involvement and acceptance" and "avoidance" subdimensions had a positive effect on empathy skills, whereas the "pity" subdimension had a marginally negative effect.

1. Involvement, Acceptance and Avoidance

To gain a data about children with special need had to receive an equal education, good services, a harmonious education, to be free from discrimination, and to have a good and just educational system, Sulthon's conducted a research focusing on how parents and the community perceived inclusive schools. According to the research findings (shown in Topic 2), bullying of children with special needs in public settings became a concern. Some people were so traumatized by the experience that they were



an empowered school culture, and establish social structures (Lindsay & McPherson, 2012; Sulthon, 2023)

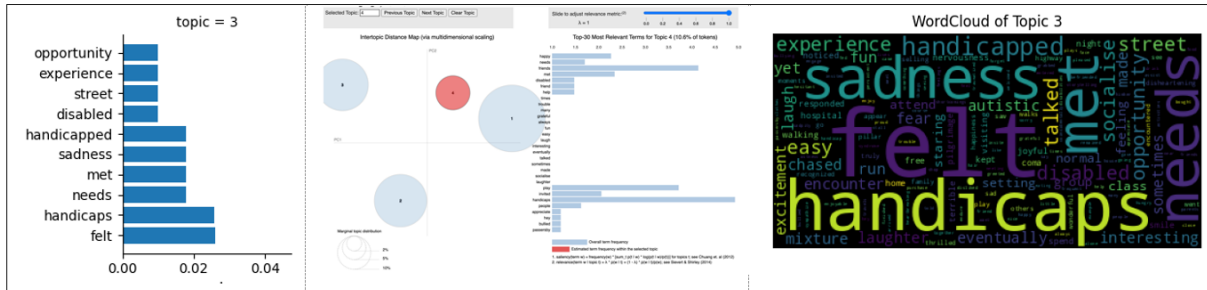


Figure 5. Topic 3

CONCLUSION

Students exhibited confidence and endorse the disabled children’s capacity to engage in various contexts, both collaboratively and independently, despite necessitating considerable assistance. Furthermore, students comprehended the difficulties encountered by children with special needs and were capable of fostering and utilizing their empathy. Students acknowledged that children with disabilities might exhibit abilities that exceed their own. Individuals cultivated awareness and comprehension of their individuality, acknowledged their strengths, weaknesses, and diverse needs. Educators could formulate strategies to improve inclusive education in multicultural framework. Five essential elements in multicultural setting for inclusive education comprised content integration, knowledge construction processes, equitable pedagogy, prejudice mitigation, and a school culture that was empowered and socially organized. The final element could be executed by differentiating multiple facets of the learning process, such as content, interests, pace, access, outcomes, curriculum sequence, organization, teacher availability, instructional style, and grouping, to improve content integration, knowledge construction, and equitable pedagogy. Without the availability of openness, polarization would ensue. The dimension of multicultural education encompassed not only the integration of content, knowledge construction processes, and equitable pedagogical opportunities for all groups, but also necessitated the enhancement of school and social culture, alongside the mitigation of prejudice to establish authentic multicultural education. Diversity, acceptance, and a sense of belonging became essential components of self-awareness to be cultivated in inclusive education in multicultural context. Educators could implement strategies that promote student interaction and experimentation to augment awareness and empathy, cultivate peer support networks, and influence perceptions via self-concept development.



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