



Bullying Behavior of Regular Students Toward Students with Special Needs (Autism Spectrum Disorders)

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Abstract

Bullying by regular students toward students with special needs in high schools providing inclusive education is a harmful behavior that must be detected and treated immediately. Students with special needs in this study belong to the autistic spectrum disorder. This study attempts to provide an overview of the level and form of bullying behavior in schools. The research approach used is survey research. The data collection technique used a Likert scale with 15 items. The scale's validity in this study was tested using expert validation, and the scale's reliability was calculated using the Cronbach's Alpha formula. The sample in this study was 31 regular students who were chosen through purposive sampling. The results showed that regular students' bullying behavior towards students with special needs was 26%, which was in the extremely low category. Although classified as extremely low category, the interpretation of scores explains several forms of bullying that occur, including verbal bullying such as calling by silly names, ridiculing, and demeaning, as well as psychological bullying such as displaying negative body language, neglecting, and excluding students with special needs from the association. Furthermore, prevention methods to the problem of bullying have also been addressed in this study.

Keywords: *Bullying; Students with Special Needs; High School Providing Inclusive Education*

Introduction

Inclusive education is an educational system that emphasizes each student's unique characteristics (Taufan & Mazhud, 2012). Schools that provide inclusive education allow students with special needs and regular students to study together in the same environment, adhering to the principle of adaptive learning. Additionally, Sunanto (in Taufan & Mazhud, 2012) indicated that an effective inclusive education provider school should include an adaptive curriculum, ability-based assessment, and students with special needs receiving customized learning programs.

The objective of inclusive education institutions is to ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn, grow, and engage with classmates who have a variety of characteristics. According to Yusuf et al. (2018), inclusive education ensures that all children have equal access to a broad range of educational opportunities based on their talents, interests, potential, and needs. The objective for the future is that students with special needs receive an adequate education, socialize, and interact with their peers more

effectively. This is consistent with the general objective of education, which is to educate children academically and help them grow and acquire a feeling of equality, solidarity, and social skills.

The diversity of characteristics, ranging from physical conditions to students' capabilities, can benefit or adversely affect the school with an inclusive education environment. The positive influence is that the presence of students with special needs teaches other students to accept and value each student's uniqueness. On the other side, the highly diverse characteristics of students can also cause conflict (Salend, 2011). Negative conflict arises when someone acts violently to injure another person verbally, physically, or psychologically. This act is considered bullying if it continues over an extended period and is repeated. Olweus (in Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015) defines bullying as behavior that frequently injures another person, both verbally and physically. This occasionally occurs due to an imbalance in the offender's physical and psychological strength relative to the victim.

Bullying is the act of disturbing a person or group in a way that is unpleasant, threatening, injurious, and attacking physically, verbally, and psychologically. That causes the victim to feel insecure until it hurts (Murtie, 2014). Olweus (in Murtie, 2014) defines bullying as both direct and indirect bullying. Direct bullying refers to bullying that occurs directly through verbal and physical intimidation. Additionally, activities that result in an attempt to harm someone directly through words are referred to as verbal bullying. Verbal bullying occurs when someone is made fun of, mocked, yelled at, called improper names, or given embarrassing nicknames. Meanwhile, physical bullying is an act that results in an attempt to physically harm someone, such as the seizure of things, the tugging of clothing, or the shoving, until the worst-case scenario occurs: hitting. Additionally, indirect bullying occurs when someone is persuaded not to make friends with the victim, slander is committed, the victim is excluded from the association, and quip with bad words.

According to Ohsako (in Arya, 2018), the consequences of bullying conduct may be classified into three categories: the impact on schools, offenders, and victims. The impact on schools, among other things, is that it weakens discipline, violates rules, and can even impair the learning process. Additionally, bullies can be expelled from school, face punishments from their surroundings, and are more likely to engage in juvenile criminality. Meanwhile, those who are bullied are the most likely to be bullied. Bullying victims may suffer dread, uncertainty at school, and low self-esteem, interfering with learning activities and decreasing academic and non-academic achievements. In this context, Angold et al. (in Darmayanti et al., 2019) indicate that victims of bullying may experience anxiety, depression, and even personality issues in the form of anti-social behavior.

Numerous research has been conducted on regular students' bullying behavior against students with special needs. One of these is the research conducted by Damayanto et al. (2020) on bullying in schools delivering inclusive education at the junior high school level. Data were gathered through interviews and observations. The findings of this study explain bullying behavior, which includes physical, verbal, and psychological bullying. Several distinct study topics were identified as a result of a literature review. This study aims to determine the level and form of bullying behavior by regular students toward students with special needs at the high school. Additionally, this study discusses the reasons, impacts, and solutions to bullying behavior.

A preliminary study conducted through an unstructured interview with one of the subject teachers at the associated school revealed instances of bullying directed towards students with special needs. The behavior appears within the association's rejection of students with special needs. Students with special needs in this study are classified with autism spectrum disorders. As such, the goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of regular students' bullying behavior.

Methods

This research falls into the category of survey research. The population of this study consisted of regular students from one high school providing inclusive education. Purposive sampling was used to choose the sample for this study. The subjects chosen for this study were regular students who engaged in learning activities, played, and socialized with students with special needs. As a result, 31 regular students from the 10th grade were chosen as samples for this study. The data collection technique employed in this study is a Likert scale, which has five response categories: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always, and each response category is assigned a score between 1 and 5. Likert scale indicators in this survey included 15 items that covered various topics, including verbal bullying, physical bullying, and psychological bullying. Table 1 illustrates the matrix of bullying forms used in this study.

Table 1. Matrices of bullying forms

Indicator	Sub-indicator	Item No.	Total Item
Verbal Bullying	Calling by nickname	1	1
	Reproach	2	1
	Humbling	3	1
	Threaten	4	1
	Yelling	5	1
Physical Bullying	Push	6	1
	Hit	7	1
	Throwing things	8	1
	Breaking things	9	1
	Nudge	10	1
Psychological Bullying	Displays negative body language	11	1
	Neglecting	12	1
	Excluding from the association	13	1
	Doing slander	14	1
	Taking advantage	15	1
Total			15

In this study, expert validation was employed to validate the instruments. The instrument utilized in the research has been pronounced valid because three validators, a constructivist, a material substance expert, and a linguist, have all stated that the instrument is acceptable and applicable. Cronbach's Alpha is used to determine the reliability of a scale. Cronbach's Alpha = 0.7, indicating that the scale is reliable. This study's descriptive quantitative data analysis technique aims to explain the categories of bullying behavior levels and the forms of bullying perpetrated by regular students against students with special needs in 10th grade of Language Class.

Results and Discussion

Results

According to preliminary research findings conducted through unstructured interviews with teachers and school principals, bullying occurs in the school environment. The analysis of bullying behavior intentions for regular students was then conducted to determine the extent of student bullying behavior, including whether it was verbal, physical, or psychological. The following summarizes the research findings on each aspect of bullying.

Table 2. Indicator scores of verbal bullying

Item No.	Total Item	Score	F	Total Score Average	%
1,2,3,4,5	5	(A) 5	0	0	0%
		(O) 4	0	0	0%
		(S) 3	7	21	9%
		(R) 2	64	128	55%
		(N) 1	84	84	36%
Total			155	233	100%
Maximum Score				775	
% Average				30%	

According to the table above, regular students engage in verbal bullying by using nicknames, reproaching, and demeaning students with special needs, with a score for sometimes (S) 9%, rarely (R) 55%, and never (N) 36%. Along with verbal bullying, a section on physical bullying includes the following.

Table 3. Indicator scores of physical bullying

Item No.	Total Item	Score	F	Total Score Average	%
6,7,8,9,10	5	(A) 5	0	0	0%
		(O) 4	0	0	0%
		(S) 3	0	0	0%
		(R) 2	0	0	0%
		(N) 1	155	155	100%
Total			155	155	100%
Maximum Score				775	
% Average				20%	

According to the table above, the score indicates that no student has ever physically harmed a student with special needs, which means that regular students responded with never (100%) on the physical bullying indicator. Apart from physical bullying, there is also a description of psychological bullying, which includes the following.

Table 4. Indicator scores of psychological bullying

Item No.	Total Item	Score	F	Total Score Average	%
11,12,13,14,15	5	(A) 5	0	0	0%
		(O) 4	0	0	0%
		(S) 3	5	15	7%
		(R) 2	53	106	49%
		(N) 1	97	97	44%
Total			155	193	100%
Maximum Score				775	
% Average				28%	

In the table above, ordinary students engage in psychological bullying by expressing negative body language, neglecting, and excluding students with special needs from the association, with a percentage score: 7% sometimes, 49% rarely, and 44% never.

According to studies on the bullying behavior intents of regular students toward students with special needs, the average percentage of verbal, physical, and psychological bullying indicators are 30%, 20%, and 28%, respectively. After collecting data for each indicator, the scores are classified into five categories: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high. The following section discusses how regular students' bullying intents toward students with special needs are categorized.

Table 5. Categorization of bullying behavior intentions

Category	% Interval
Very High	85 – 100%
High	69 – 84%
Moderate	53 – 68%
Low	37 – 52%
Very Low	≤ 36%

In Table 6, an analysis of the bullying behavior intentions of regular students toward students with special needs is presented.

Table 6. Results analysis for bullying intentions of regular students towards students with special needs

Indicator	Percentage	Category	Final Result
Verbal Bullying	30%	Very Low	26% (Very Low)
Physical Bullying	20%	Very Low	
Psychological Bullying	28%	Very Low	

Based on the facts above, it can be inferred that the bullying behavior intention of regular students towards students with special needs is 26% which is included in the extremely low category. However, this score still shows that some regular students have done verbal and psychological bullying against students with special needs, such as calling by nicknames, reproaching, demeaning, displaying negative body language, neglecting, and excluding students with special needs from the association.

Discussion

Bullying can occur to anybody, anywhere, and at any time. According to Swearer et al. (2012), bullying behavior can occur in the classroom, on the school grounds, on and from school, and even in cyberspace (cyberbullying). The study's findings indicate that the forms of bullying in 10th grade of Language Class are classified as verbal and psychological bullying. Verbal bullying by regular students comes in the form of reproaching, humbling, and calling inappropriate nicknames. Students with special needs may feel offended and embarrassed by the reproach they receive. When regular students confront children with special needs, they occasionally defend themselves but more often than not remain silent. Reproaching is a type of verbal bullying behavior (Murtie, 2014). Additionally, reproach with harsh words can cause hurt feelings and a person's self-esteem to drop.

Furthermore, calling other students inappropriate nicknames daily might make the student concerned feel insecure (Murtie, 2014), mainly if the nickname is used to demonstrate the victim's features or deficiencies. Specific individuals who are called inappropriate names frequently experience distress due to embarrassment. Additionally, Afriani (2018) noted that offenders of verbal bullying typically call the victim an inappropriate nickname without considering the implications of the action.

This behavior is intended to demonstrate that he/she is more powerful and capable of controlling someone, causing him to go toward weak people as victims of bullying behavior.

According to the research by Sakinah & Marlina (2018), verbal bullying behaviors that are frequently observed in inclusive schools include ridiculing, laughing, manipulating, assigning specific labels, and discriminating against students with special needs. Damayanto et al. (2020) stated that verbal bullying is a form of bullying that students frequently commit and if left untreated, can lead to more severe forms of bullying. Verbal bullying is just as terrible as physical or psychological bullying because it can have a long-lasting effect on the victim's mental or psychological health. Additionally, indirect verbal bullying can undermine a person's self-esteem and cause depression and anxiety (Amanda, 2021).

Along with verbal bullying, some regular students engage in indirect bullying by excluding students with special needs from the association. According to Olweus (in Arya, 2018), bullying occurs when a student or a group of students ignores and isolates other people from their environment. According to the opinion expressed above, one of the difficulties autistic children and teenagers face is being harassed and rejected by classmates and even siblings (Carter, 2009). This study's findings indicate that students with special needs are more likely to be bullied than other students their age. The report's findings indicate that they face more significant social exclusion, such as being purposefully abandoned by other students (Kloosterman et al., 2013).

According to Murtie, (2014), being isolated from society is not an easy thing, especially at a young age. At that age, friends are people who can encourage growth and development and become a place to share many things. Friendship should be fun and can create the spirit of enjoying an activity together. In addition, having friends who are constantly supportive under any circumstances is associated with a lower risk of being a victim of bullying (Kochenderfer & Ladd in Swearer et al., 2012). On the other side, if a person is excommunicated by his peers, he/she would feel lonely and can promote a sense of hopelessness in him. One of the causes for exclusion is that students with special needs have distinct features from regular students and have less ability to adapt to their surroundings optimally.

Cases of bullying that often emerge in the school environment can harm both regular students and students with special needs. The results of research back this theory by Cappadocia et al. (2012), which demonstrates that students with autism spectrum disorders have a more significant probability of being victims of bullying than regular students their age. Furthermore, Schroeder et al. (2014) suggested that students with special needs are more likely to be victims of bullying than regular students due to their difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and difficulties in developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.

According to Eroglu & Kilic (2020), students with autism spectrum disorders and mild mental disability can become victims of verbal bullying by other boy students without a teacher. Additionally, Murtie (2014) said that numerous bullying behaviors occur when students with special needs are belittled, mocked, called bad names, shunned, used, intimidated, and even physically attacked. Bullies frequently feel more resilient, powerful, great, and possess other superior qualities, which is why they frequently target students with special needs, who prefer to be alone and weak.

The traits that distinguish students with special needs from other students their age ensure that their presence always draws the attention of others around them. Differences are extremely attractive to bullies because they allow them to bother the victim (Murtie, 2014). Amanda (2021) noted that someone with mental disabilities, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, or Down syndrome is frequently viewed as a problem by bullies. Bullies make a point of criticizing a person's unique features to turn it into a negative topic. Then they want everyone around them to agree that these unique characteristics are flaws that must be eliminated from a person (Amanda, 2021). Additionally, there are various stigmas associated with

students with special needs, including the ability to obstruct the learning process, frequently having low grades, and being less able to integrate into their surroundings. This stigma is applied to students with special needs who do not receive complete social acceptability (Dulisanti, 2015).

In this study, bullying occurred against students with special needs who were classified as having autism spectrum disorders. According to Rowley et al. (2012), multiple studies demonstrate that the elements that contribute to kids with autism being victims of bullying include differences in their tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions, and body language compared to other students. Additionally, due to autistic students' inability to comprehend social rules and adjust to their peers, they become targets of bullying. Furthermore, Carrington & Graham (2001) showed how a lack of interest and a narrow emphasis on dialogue could worsen isolation and make autistic students more susceptible to bullying and exclusion from society.

In light of the preceding, the study's findings indicate that difficulties with social cognition and communication are one of the reasons why autistic students become victims of bullying. Accordingly, (McCormack et al. (2011) observed that kids with communication and language problems had lower social relationships and were more likely to be bullied than other students. Additionally, poor social relationships can emerge because one of the features of autistic individuals is their preference for solitude and inability to integrate into their environment. This is consistent with Sejiwa's statement in Rachmah (2014) that someone who struggles to get along with others is one of the characteristics that put them at risk becoming a victim of bullying. Based on the findings of multiple prior research, it can be inferred that some components of social skills, such as communication abilities, assertive behavior, and others, affect students with special needs' ability to adjust to their surroundings. As a result, students with autism spectrum disorders and limited social skills have been reported as victims of bullying by other students in some situations.

As a result of the explanation above, it can be stated that numerous variables contribute to students with special needs becoming victims of bullying. Along with the high or low social skills possessed by students with special needs and their characteristics, bullying is also influenced by factors that come from the bullies, such as their level of aggression, lack of empathy, and perception of students with special needs as being weak. The results suggested that the more negative responses regular students had toward students with special needs in their interactions, the greater the likelihood of bullying behavior occurring, and vice versa (Hasanah & Nurhamida, 2016). In this regard, Dapa (2019) proposed that the presence of students with special needs within a single social system can result in a variety of reactions. While some of them disagreed because of negative reasons and perceptions, others accepted the presence of students with special needs in their society.

The results of this study's score interpretation revealed that regular students responded more positively to the presence of students with special needs in inclusive schools. Accepting the presence of students with special needs in the learning process, inviting them to participate in group discussions, refraining from bullying in the same way that other friends do, and displaying a loving attitude toward students with special needs are the responses. In this regard, Amanda (2021) argued that caring means that we are here to help and end the bullying, even if we are not directly involved in the situation. Caring is closely tied with empathy, defined as an attitude of connectivity between two human beings. In this context, some researchers argue that empathy encompasses both cognitive and affective components of an individual. Empathy is a cognitive capacity, namely the ability to understand other people's feelings, while affective ability is to feel other people's emotions (Davis, 1983; Hogan, 1969; Strayer, 1993 in Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011).

According to the definition above, empathy can be associated with bullying behavior. According to one of the research findings, if someone possesses a high level of empathy, he or she is less likely to

engage in bullying (Izzah et al., 2019). Meanwhile, Rahayu & Permana (2019) argued that a lack of empathy is one of the most frequent reasons for someone becoming a bully. This is consistent with research by Rachmah (2014) indicating that bullies lack empathy, resulting in an inability to comprehend the victim's condition and a general lack of concern for the victim's well-being. Additionally, Jolliffe & Farrington explain in Rahayu & Permana (2019) that someone who lacks empathy will be less able to respond to the distress of those who are bullied because they cannot relate their anti-social behavior to other people's emotional reactions. Additionally, the study's findings indicate that regular students at schools that provide inclusive education have a better level of empathy than regular students in regular schools (Listika, 2018). This implies that ordinary students accustomed to interacting with students with special needs can acquire a more empathic attitude, although bullying occasionally occurs in schools that provide inclusive education.

Students who are bullied desperately need support from various people in their immediate environment. No matter how minor an incidence of bullying happens in a school, it must be dealt with promptly and effectively. Several measures that the school can take to prevent and reduce bullying behavior include understanding the definition of bullying, the various forms of bullying, and the impact of bullying behavior on all school members, particularly to regular students who have been identified as bullies. Additionally, providing instruction in areas of social skills can assist both regular students and students with special needs in developing empathy, assertiveness, cooperation, and other skills necessary for each student to respect the characteristics of others. Along with students, every teacher must demonstrate a high level of empathy when educating students in the classroom, particularly students with special needs, to pay more attention to student's needs and facilitate learning. The study's results demonstrated that teaching empathy is critical for establishing and sustaining a positive school atmosphere, with the potential advantage of preventing bullying incidents in the future (Murphy et al., 2018).

In reference to the previous approach, Eroglu & Kilic (2020) explained that the school should provide a social skill development program for all students, including programs for managing emotions, acting adaptively, solving difficulties, and communicating assertively. According to Rowley et al. (2012), learning is necessary to support and strengthen autistic students' social interaction abilities to assist them in developing and maintaining friendships with classmates and avoiding incidents of bullying. The preceding explanation supports the premise that social skills learning is an excellent fit for regular students and special needs students. According to Reed et al. (2011), students with autism spectrum disorders demonstrate deficits in social abilities such as initiating conversations, responding to social situations and resolving social problems. As a result, all students require social skill development that is beneficial for preventing and resolving incidents of bullying that occur in the school environment.

Along with providing interventions such as teaching social skills and understanding bullying, schools should pay greater attention to the negative consequences of bullying, ranging from depression and anxiety disorders to the most extreme cases when victims self-injure (Yu et al., 2022). Collaboration between principals, teachers, and friends to follow school regulations, respect the diversity of each student's characteristics, and support victims of bullying in recovering from depression are some of the most direct interventions to help reduce bullying in schools with inclusive education in Mataram. Additionally, parental support is critical to constantly reinforce, entertain, and encourage students with special needs who are bullied. If these solutions are implemented correctly, they can indirectly accomplish one of the aims of the school with inclusive education, namely recognizing and appreciating all students' diversity. This can subsequently result in more optimal learning and the development of a welcoming environment for teachers and students in the school environment.

Conclusion

Bullying behavior by regular students toward students with special needs falls into the very low category. However, the score's interpretation outlines numerous types of bullying, including verbal bullying, which includes calling someone by a bad nickname, reproaching, and insulting them. Additionally, psychological bullying was also observed, which included using unpleasant body language, neglecting, and excluding children with special needs from the relationship. On the other side, some regular students respond positively to the presence of students with special needs. Accepting the presence of students with special needs allows them to participate in the learning process and fosters a caring attitude. Despite a low incidence of bullying behavior, schools must give a preventive strategy in bullying awareness and social skills learning to all students.

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