

# Social Participation of Deaf Students within Inclusive Higher Education

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Most children with special needs in schools that provide inclusive education still experience difficulties with developing social relationships with peers; their social tendencies are often limited to peers who also have special needs. The purpose of this study was to examine the social participation of deaf students at the University of Lambung Mangkurat in Banjarmasin, Indonesia, which included 28 people, of whom 5 were deaf students and 23 were their peers. Social participation was examined through three indicators: friendships or social relationships, classmates' acceptance, and student perceptions. We used a quantitative approach with a survey for this research. To collect data, we used interviews, questionnaires, and other documentation. The results of the study show that social participation in inclusive settings for deaf students with peers can provide positive benefits. This research has implications for lecturers, for preparing learning management approaches that build student social participation.

**Key words:** *Social participation, deaf students, inclusive education.*

## Introduction

In Indonesia, every citizen has the right to education (1945 Constitution). The provision of educational services that are equal and without discrimination for all students is built into policies in the Indonesian education system (Law Number 20 of 2003). The granting of education rights to every citizen is an effort to support the initiative to organise Education for All launched by the United Nations and the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO 1994); emphasising that the practice of inclusive education in regular schools is an important strategy to fulfill the right to education for all children. Inclusive education is an effort to overcome the barriers that each child faces to participate in learning, related to gender, religion, physical barriers, social-emotional barriers, and learning achievement differences (Booth and Ainscow 1998).

The practice of inclusive education in Indonesia starts from early childhood education, through to primary education and secondary education. Inclusive education strategies are also practiced in higher education (Indonesian Government 2017), including Lambung Mangkurat University in Banjarmasin, which began improving in this area in 2017 by accepting various types of special needs students, including deaf students.

A deaf person is someone who has a deficiency in or loss of hearing ability, either partly or wholly, so that they cannot use their hearing in daily life, which seriously impacts all aspects of their lives (Haenuddin 2013). Barriers to hearing in children results in language input being minimal, so deaf children struggle to communicate verbally. In general, deaf people use sign language for communication, thus ultimately limiting their associations mostly to fellow deaf people (Nur'aeni 2017).

The implementation of inclusive education enables special needs children, including the deaf, to access education services in the nearest school that suits their needs. Deaf children can socialise and communicate with the surrounding community so that they feel part of it. Education for special needs children is crucial for community survival because, through education, children can interact with others and be treated the same as other children (Indonesian Government 2003).

Educational institutions providing inclusive education are attractive to parents of special needs children; the latest data show that many parents choose to send their special needs children to schools that are inclusive education providers. As such, the number of special needs children enrolled in host schools in the last few decades has substantially increased (Ferguson 2008).

Inclusive education focuses on the obstacles faced by students without ignoring policy, practice, and culture development in educational systems and institutions, so educators can adapt to student diversity and treat students equally (Booth and Ainscow 2002). In inclusive schools, diversity is not a problem but is rather treated as a source of learning. Inclusive education is not a goal that can be reached at any given moment but is rather an ongoing process. However, inclusive education is a complex and at times controversial topic that can trigger debates among stakeholders with differing views. Uncertainty and confusion exist about the meaning of the inclusive paradigm in regular schools (Ainscow et al. 2000; Angelides 2005; Angelides et al. 2006). Various methods are used to promote inclusive education so that it does not only focus on school activities (Ainscow 1999; Magee and Smith 2013).

Commitments to inclusive education around the world continue to increase (Sharma, et al. 2013). Some research results confirm that inclusive education is a joint effort to fulfill every

child's right to learn in school (Falvey and Givner 2005). Inclusive education is contrary to the segregation education paradigm, where special needs children and children without disabilities are educated separately (Tarmansyah 2007). Schools must be committed to implementing a strategy that encourages all students to participate, and must have a positive attitude regarding inclusivity. Principals, teachers, students, and families should work together to implement inclusive practices considering the various aspects of policy, culture, and learning. Thus, inclusive education is a philosophy and shared learning is beneficial for everyone, including students with disabilities.

Most parents of special needs children assume that their children will benefit positively in academic terms if they are sent to regular schools that provide inclusive education (Frederickson et al. 2004). However, the main reason parents of special needs children send their children to regular schools providing inclusive education rather than to special needs schools is because parents assume that their children's social opportunities increase in inclusive schools (Sloper and Tyler 1992; Nakken and Pijl 2002).

Parents hope that their special needs children can build positive relationships with peers in the inclusive school environment because obstacles experienced by special needs children impact their ability to foster good social relationships in many situations. A previous study showed that in general, special needs students do not automatically enter into friendships between themselves and students without special needs (Guralnick et al. 2007; Lee et al. 2003; Buysse et al. 2002). Difficulties in forming relationships with peers were experienced by almost one-quarter of students with special needs (Frostd and Pijl 2007). Several studies have found that students with autism and students with severe behavioral disorders have difficulty socialising with peers, which often causes these children to withdraw from the social environment (De Monchy et al. 2004; Chamberlain et al. 2007, Garrison-Harrell et al. 1997). Special needs students who experience mild levels of impairment also report social dissatisfaction with peers without special needs, compared to peers who also have special needs (Gresham and MacMillan 1997).

Some research shows that special needs children in schools providing inclusive education still experience difficulties with fostering social relationships with peers; their social inclinations are limited to peers who also have special needs. If they lack contact with peers, their social skills do not develop, and they often develop a negative self-perception (Cambra and Silvestre 2003; Bender and Wall 1994). Negative self-perceptions lead to externalising behavior, such as aggression, and internalising, such as anxiety (Durrant et al. 1990). For children with special needs, isolation from the environment is common because of their separation from their surrounding environment.

Based on these findings, evaluating social abilities in special needs children is essential for educational institutions that provide inclusive education, starting from elementary school level to tertiary level. The success of the delivery of inclusive education to special needs children includes both academic service delivery and the development of social relationships throughout the school community. When implementing inclusive education, the social dimension is an important aspect that should not be overlooked (Koster et al. 2010).

The criteria for the successful implementation of a more inclusive system ultimately depends on what occurs in schools and classrooms (Ainscow 2007). The existence of a support system is the key to the successful implementation of inclusive practices, including resources for schools, social support, teacher training, and community participation. For example, developing collaboration between parents and school staff, as well as collaboration between related organisations, is essential for inclusive education to succeed (Kantavong 2018).

The ambiguity of the concept of inclusivity used by researchers creates a problem when measuring inclusion success in terms of social aspects. To illustrate the social dimensions of inclusion, various concepts have been adopted (Koster et al. 2009). Three umbrella concepts are often used by researchers: social integration, social inclusion, and social participation, but no consensus has been reached on the meaning of the three concepts. The concept of social participation has been highly recommended for measuring the success of inclusion programs (Koster et al. 2009). For some researchers, friendship relationships between students illustrate social participation (Hunt et al. 1996; Harper et al. 1999), whereas other researchers have emphasised self-perception and interactions between students (Pavri and Luftig 2000; Kamps et al. 1999), or considered the concept of social participation, which is limited to the acceptance of special needs students by peers (Odom 2000; Stanovich et al. 1998). Social participation is measured through four main aspects: social self-perception of students, classmates' acceptance, contacts/interactions, and friendship/relationships (Koster et al. 2009), and we adopted social participation in this study. However, we focused on three themes of social participation: social friendship relationships, self-perception of social abilities, and acceptance from peers in a learning class.

The purpose of this study was to examine the social participation of deaf students at the University of Lambung Mangkurat. Specifically, we examined and described the social participation of special needs students, especially deaf students, in the Special Education Study Program in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Lambung Mangkurat, Banjarmasin, Indonesia, which is a university that provides inclusive education.

## **Establishment Setting of Inclusive Social Participation at University of Lambung Mangkurat**

Since being established in 2017 as an inclusive campus, the University of Lambung Mangkurat, Banjarmasin has designed various models of inclusive services:

- (1) Provision of volunteers: A total of 15 senior student volunteers are provided to serve and assist special needs students, starting the process of admission of new students, campus environment orientation, and classroom learning at the beginning of the semester.
- (2) Inclusive promotion: All coordinators of the study programs accept the promotion of inclusive services, so that they can understand and prepare services to accept special needs students.
- (3) Lecturer guidance in learning: All lecturers supporting courses at the beginning of learning are provided training and guidance on inclusive learning strategies.
- (4) Participation of special needs students in student activities at the Student Creativity Event: Through arrangements prepared by volunteers and lecturers, as well as administrative staff, services are provided to establish social participation between special needs students and students in general.

### **Method**

This research was conducted using a quantitative approach to examine deaf students' social participation in the Special Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Lambung Mangkurat University. We collected data using the survey method. The survey method can best be used to obtain data from a particular place that is natural (not artificial) (Sugiyono 2016). We examined three out of the four proposed social participation themes: social friendship relationships, social self-perception, and classmates' acceptance in one class of learning (Koster et al. 2009). The survey questions used were developed as the research instrument, with five options: strongly agree (score 4), agree (score 3), neutral (score 2), disagree (score 1), and strongly disagree (score 0).

The data source in this study is all forms of information in the form of words, or actions from respondents related to the social participation of deaf students who are targeted. Respondents in this study were 5 deaf students (3 men and 2 women), and 23 classmates (2 men and 21 women) Data collection was carried out by distributing questionnaires filled out by deaf students and classmates. The distribution and filling of questionnaires was done in class. Deaf students fill out the questionnaire given with the help of a companion. The informants both deaf students and classmates have agreed to participate in providing information related to the data needed in this study, provided that their names only use initials. Data analysis techniques in this study used descriptive statistics with formulas:

$$\text{Percentage of social participation} = \frac{\text{acquisition score}}{\text{maximum score}} \times 100\%.$$

**Table 1:** Criteria for evaluating the social participation level of deaf students.

Aspects of Social Participation	Number of items in the questionnaire	Respondent	Score scale	Acquisition Score	Maximum Score
Social relations/ friendship between deaf students and their classmates	30	Deaf Student Classmates' without hearing impairment	0 – 4	The total score obtained in real time from the informant is based on questionnaire filling	120
Deaf student perception towards the acceptance of their classmates	10	Deaf Student	0 – 4	The total score obtained in real time from the informant is based on questionnaire filling	40
Acceptance of classmates towards deaf students.	10		0 – 4	The total score obtained in real time from the informant is based on questionnaire filling	40

The value obtained was then interpreted in accordance with the guidelines in Table 1.

**Table 2:** Criteria for evaluating the social participation level of deaf students

Percentage	Criteria
91–100%	Excellent
76–90%	Very good
61–75%	Good
51–60%	Sufficient
≤ 50%	Minimal

## Results and Discussion

The results of our research on the three dimensions of the social participation of deaf students are as follows:

### Social Relations/Friendship between Deaf Students and Their Classmates

**Table 3:** Result of Social Relations/Friendship between Deaf Students and Their Classmates

No	Respondent	Gender	Percentage
1	SCP	Male	55,83%
2	MRI	Male	75%
3	MAF	Male	70%
4	EYD	Female	65,83%
5	EPS	Female	56,67
Average			64,66%
Criteria			Good

Table 3 shows that the percentage of social relations / friendship between deaf students and their classmates is 64.66% included in good criteria. Hearing impairment impacts the language and communication of deaf students. Deaf students may struggle to interact because social interaction requires good language skills, and deaf students have difficulty with verbal communication. These communication difficulties tend to impede social skills and social relationships (Antia et al. 2011). Deaf students typically communicate using sign language, but not all their classmates may be able to understand. Researchers and practitioners have concerns around the social interactions of children with hearing impairments who learn in inclusive schools, due to their limited communication and peer interaction (Kluwin et al. 2002).

These barriers ultimately result in interactions being unmemorable or unpleasant because there is no connection in the conversation. A good social interaction occurs when the interlocutor can understand the purpose of the conversation. Rogers, an American rural sociologist who focuses on communication research studies, especially in terms of the spread of innovation as quoted by (Cangara 2006; Bintoro 2010), defined communication as a process where an idea is conveyed from the source to one or more recipients with a view of changing behavior, which in turn will lead to a deep mutual understanding.

Experiences related to social interactions can be difficult and disappointing for the deaf due to difficulty in understanding the words of the other person, mistakenly perceiving the expressions and body language of others, or because the other person is unable to understand the intent of the deaf person's communication. As reported by Disca, a deaf student who



experiences social problems due to attending a regular public school, they can understand their friend's language but their friends cannot understand their language (Stephani 2009).

During social development, deaf people generally experience problems with social adjustment. Social adjustment is the capacity to react effectively or adequately to the reality of the environment so that individuals are able to meet social demands in ways that are acceptable and satisfying to themselves and their environment (Nurhisan and Agustin 2011). Successful social adjustment is manifested in the ability of individuals to establish communication with others, align themselves with the demands of the environment, meet the rules of community groups, and be able to create healthy relationships with others, develop friendships, and play an active role in social activities. In addition, it involves respect for values, social laws, and traditions.

These situations can produce a lack of confidence in the deaf child. In relation to social participation, most deaf students are hesitant or do not want to ask classmates for help with the problems they face. This probably occurs because the deaf student faces barriers to conveying their problem to classmates. The deaf student is unrealistic about their condition, which is limited, so that they absolutely need others as social beings. A significant relationship was found between self-confidence and the communication skills of deaf children in Karya Mulia II Surabaya Exceptional School. Self-confidence is the degree of belief one has in themselves in relation to a specific task or requirement, and as a personal characteristic includes confidence in one's abilities, optimism, objectivity, responsibility, and rationality (Suryani 2010).

However, in this study, Table 2 shows that the five deaf students stated they had social relationships or friendships between themselves and their classmates, with 10% strongly agreeing, 60% agreeing, 8.5% being neutral, and 21.5% and 0% disagreeing and strongly disagreeing, respectively. We found that 70% (10% + 60%) of the students demonstrated participation through friendship fairly well.

The social relationships and friendships between deaf students and their classmates were quite good, helping them overcome the difficulties in making friends and their lack of trust when interacting with non-deaf classmates.



## Deaf Students' Perception of Classmates' Acceptance

**Table 4:** Result of Deaf Students' Perception of Classmates' Acceptance

No	Respondent	Gender	Percentage
1	SCP	Male	60%
2	MRI	Male	77.5%
3	MAF	Male	70%
4	EYD	Female	72.5%
5	EPS	Female	75%
Average			71%
Criteria			Good

Table 4 shows the percentage of deaf student responses to the acceptance of classmates by 71% included in good criteria. Deaf students tend to have a good attitude toward their classmates. In general, the classmates understand the conditions and obstacles experienced by deaf students. Deaf students assume that classmates treat them well, but some deaf students assumed that some classmates do not want to provide help, and some do not want to take them to the cafeteria. This may be due to some classmates experiencing difficulties in communicating with the deaf students; they may not be unwilling to invite the deaf students to join them but they are confused about how to do so, because verbal communication can be hard to understand by deaf students if the other students do not know sign language.

Empathy affects whether an individual will apologise for the mistakes made by other individuals. According to Sulfiyasari (2017) empathy means the ability to feel what is felt by others. When regular students understand the feelings of their friends who are special needs students, a sense of respect emerges. Regular students will understand the situation of special needs students who have limitations. From here, a sense of appreciation and empathy emerges, so when special needs students make mistakes, regular students will forgive them. Not surprisingly, deaf students may consider it difficult to make friends with peers. Many deaf students report that although they participate in social activities with hearing peers, their interactions do not last long; emotionally, deaf students feel safe with friends who are also deaf, although some deaf students expressed feeling emotionally safe with hearing classmates (Stinson and Antia 1999). Opportunity to interact, teacher support, and opportunities for extracurricular activities are factors that influence good social relationships with peers (Stinson and Antia 1999).

## Classmates' Acceptance of Deaf Students

**Table 5:** Result of Classmates' Acceptance of Deaf Students

No	Respondent	Gender	Percentage
1	AS	Female	92.5%
2	SRW	Female	92.5%
3	ISN	Female	72.5%
4	ADL	Female	97.5%
5	HN	Female	87.5%
6	ID	Female	100%
7	EPS	Female	97.5%
8	PE	Female	100%
9	RN	Male	82.5%
10	MRD	Female	90%
11	FRD	Female	97.5%
12	MWD	Female	95%
13	NV	Female	95%
14	KMF	Female	82.5%
15	TKR	Female	95%
16	MSL	Female	95%
17	ERS	Female	75%
18	MSD	Female	90%
19	EDS	Female	82.5%
20	SA	Female	92.5%
21	MLD	Female	90%
22	DEA	Female	100%
23	IHZ	Male	87.5%
	Average		86.73%
	Criteria		Very Good

Table 5 shows the percentage of classmates' acceptance of deaf students at 86.73% included in the very good criteria, students reported positive acceptance of deaf students as classmates. In this case, the acceptance of deaf students as classmates can be considered excellent. The deaf students' classmates showed a good understanding of the deaf students' condition. This understanding helps with the formation of positive acceptance. Most regular students never show jealousy towards deaf students who receive additional attention from lecturers, help students with hearing impairments who are experiencing difficulties, gladly accept the presence of deaf students in study groups, are willing to listen to deaf students when telling

stories using sign or oral language, do not react when deaf students are angry, have deaf students as friends, and do not avoid deaf students.

This acceptance by classmates of deaf students shows that one of the success indicators in implementing inclusive education in the Special Education Study Program, University of Lambung Mangkurat, has been achieved. According to Mastropieri and Scruggs (1994), the indicator of success of inclusive schools is acceptance in a good atmosphere, which, in this case, was supported by the strong acceptance shown by the deaf students' peers. Friends can provide support so that special needs students can learn (Hasan and Handayani 2014). Peers can help special needs students to communicate in and adjust to school (Hasan and Handayani 2014). When special needs students experience learning difficulties, regular students are often willing to help. Regular students help special needs students to adjust to school and interact with all aspects of the school. One example is when special needs students miss an explanation from the teacher in class; regular students may help explain in everyday language in a way that is easily understood by the special needs students. Regular students help special needs students learn as peers, providing a sense of comfort so that special needs students more quickly understand what was taught in class. However, when positive interactions cannot be achieved, then negative interactions tend to appear.

When regular students understand the limitations of special needs students and the importance of helping them, a safe and smooth communication environment is created between regular students and special needs students, thus minimising conflicts in friendships (Magee and Smith 2013).

## **Conclusion**

The inclusive education policy for special needs students, especially deaf students, at the University of Lambung Mangkurat in Banjarmasin, Indonesia, has been implemented and is performing well. The practice of social participation between deaf students their peers in general has shown success in inclusive education settings. The practices of establishing friendships between students, forming perceptions of each other, and accepting classmates enable all students, including those with disabilities, to accept each other and co-exist in the learning system and other aspects of life on campus. The social participation that has been proven in this study provides students with more confidence, which will support other successes within education and in employment. The inclusive education program at the University of Lambung Mangkurat Banjarmasin has positively strengthened student character education.



## **Recommendations**

This research has implications for increasing the inclusive policies of educational institutions. Lecturers need to prepare management and learning strategies that promote the social participation of special needs students in tertiary institutions. Future research also still needs to look at the various obstacles and needs of students with other special needs, to fully realise the success of inclusive education.

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