



The Role of Special Education Support Teachers in Enhancing Literacy Interest among Students with Special Needs in the School Environment

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Abstract: Education is the basic right of every child, including children with special needs, who have the right to receive a decent education in accordance with the 1945 Constitution. Along with the paradigm shift in basic education, the focus is now shifting towards inclusive learning that respects student diversity. The success of inclusive education really depends on the competence of teachers, especially Special Guidance Teachers (GPK), who play an important role in managing learning for students with special needs. By using a qualitative approach, this research was carried out at SD Negeri Melayu 11 with the aim of analyzing the effectiveness of the approach applied by ABK teachers in developing students' literacy skills, identifying supporting factors and obstacles in the literacy learning process, and providing strategic recommendations. to improve the quality of literacy teaching that is more focused and appropriate to the needs of students with special needs. The research results show that the use of learning methods that involve media has a significant influence on increasing literacy interest in children with special needs

Keywords: Children With Special Needs; Special Guidance Teachers; Students' Literacy Skills.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental right for every child, as stipulated in Article 1 of the 1945 Constitution, which states, "Every citizen has the right to education." Therefore, all individuals are entitled to equal opportunities to access education, regardless of gender, social status, or economic conditions. This also includes individuals with disabilities, who have the right to receive adequate education.

In recent years, various challenges have driven a paradigm shift in basic education, with an increasing emphasis on transitioning toward an inclusive learning environment. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate the process of inclusive learning to ensure the creation of a transformation that supports educational spaces that

value student diversity and accommodate a wide range of abilities, learning styles, and backgrounds. The success of inclusive education largely depends on the role of teachers, whose competence is the key to managing the complexities of the inclusive learning process, particularly at the elementary school level.

Data from the Ministry of National Education (2022) shows that in 2021, approximately 3.3% of the total child population were children with special needs (CWSN). Of this number, only 269,398 children received educational services at Special Schools (SLB) or schools implementing inclusive programs (Sekarrini, 2022). This reflects a significant gap, with only about 12.26% of children having access to education. According to Article 15 of Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, the education provided for children

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with special needs is Special Education. However, the number of children with special needs exceeds the capacity of existing educational facilities, leading to challenges in the field. As a result, many children with special needs are forced to attend regular elementary schools.

As more elementary schools adopt inclusive education, the need for teachers' competence in this field becomes increasingly apparent, influencing the educational process and learning outcomes for students with diverse needs (Dini, 2022). Many students with special needs in regular schools struggle to follow lessons due to a lack of support and teachers' skills in accommodating their needs. Although schools are expected to support diversity, many teachers have not been trained to handle students with special needs, resulting in teaching methods that are often inadequate. As a consequence, students' learning outcomes are low, and their development at school is suboptimal. Teachers are professionals who play a role in improving the quality of education and developing students' potential. Their duties include educating, teaching, guiding, evaluating, providing directions, training, and assessing students (Fauzi, 2023).

The school being studied has demonstrated adequate educational quality, with various aspects supporting the achievement of educational goals optimally. In terms of teacher competence, the school has met the standards set, with trained teachers possessing the appropriate abilities to support effective learning processes. Additionally, the facilities provided by the school are also sufficiently adequate, creating a comfortable and conducive environment for students to learn. The available facilities allow students to engage more effectively in lessons, support better interaction between teachers and students, and create a pleasant and productive learning atmosphere.

SD Negeri Melayu 11 is a regular school with several students with special needs when I conducted my research there. The implementation of inclusive education at this school is supported by the presence of Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) in the learning process. However, there is an issue regarding the limited number of GPKs available to support inclusion students. Learning activities, both inside and outside the classroom, are expected to enhance the active participation of all students. In class, teachers often deliver lessons and ask students to read individually or take turns with their classmates. Students are also asked to practice, such as engaging in dialogues in front of the class. However, not all students actively participate; some prefer to play with friends or toys they brought. Therefore, the presence of GPKs is crucial to improving the inclusion education services at the school.

During direct classroom observation, it was identified that there were students who experienced difficulties with basic literacy, which raised questions about the underlying factors. After further observation, it was discovered that the student in question was a child with special needs requiring intensive support from a Special Education Support Teacher (GPK) to participate effectively in the learning process. However, the shortage of GPKs at the school was one of the factors hindering optimal learning for the student. As a result, even though facilities and other resources may be adequate, the lack of appropriate support led to suboptimal education for the child with special needs, limiting their potential to learn and grow effectively.

According to Rosita (2020), the competencies of Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) not only depend on the four main competencies possessed by teachers, namely pedagogical, personal, professional, and social, but also emphasize specific skills. These specific skills include the necessary abilities to teach students with specific needs (specialists). To enhance competencies in these special skills, continuous development is required through the application of collaborative teaching methods.

Although many previous studies have explored the role of Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) in supporting children with special needs, this research is unique in that it has not yet examined the connection between this role and the technological developments in the current globalization era. This distinction makes the study relevant and important, considering the rapid technological advancements that influence teaching methods and the interaction between teachers and students with special needs today.

Method

This study aims to analyze the role of Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) in enhancing the literacy interest of students with special needs at SD Negeri Melayu 11. Additionally, the study seeks to identify the strategies implemented by teachers to engage students in literacy activities. Another objective of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the approaches used by teachers in improving students' literacy skills, as well as to identify the factors that support and hinder the literacy learning process. The study is expected to provide strategic recommendations to improve the quality of literacy teaching tailored to the needs of students with special needs.

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore in-depth the role of Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) in enhancing the literacy interest of students with special needs at SD Negeri Melayu 11. Walidin et al. (Muhammad, 2021)

explain that qualitative research is a process aimed at understanding human or social phenomena through an approach that produces a holistic and complex description. The research findings are presented in the form of verbal descriptions, reporting perspectives obtained directly from informants, and conducted in a natural context in accordance with actual conditions. Data were collected through direct observations of learning activities and in-depth interviews with teachers who handle students with special needs (CWSN). The research subjects were purposively selected, involving CWSN teachers actively engaged in literacy learning, as well as students with special needs as the primary focus. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation, which were then analyzed using descriptive-qualitative techniques through the processes of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

Observations were conducted to examine the role of Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) in assisting students with special needs, such as student activities during learning, and the strategies employed by the teacher to enhance the literacy interest of these students. This aimed to obtain a real picture of the interactions and effectiveness of the strategies applied. The interview process was carried out to gather in-depth information from Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) who are tasked with assisting students with special needs. The interview focused on understanding the various strategies applied to support the learning of students with special needs in the classroom environment, as well as identifying the various challenges or obstacles experienced while carrying out their duties. The documentation process was used to collect data related to the strategies employed.

Result and Discussion

Based on interviews and observations conducted at SD Negeri Melayu 11, the author identified several key points regarding the role of Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) in enhancing the literacy interest of students with special needs. These findings cover various aspects, such as the learning strategies applied by GPK to encourage student participation in literacy activities, the active role of GPK during the learning process, as well as the challenges and obstacles faced in assisting students with special needs. Additionally, this study explores the solutions implemented to address these difficulties, offering deeper insights into efforts to enhance literacy interest among students with special needs.

The Role of Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) in Literacy Education for Enhancing the Literacy Interest of Students with Special Needs

In the interviews, Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) explained that the students' active participation during the learning process is the primary concern that must be prioritized. To support this, various learning media are creatively and variably used to stimulate the children's motor skills. These media are designed not only to help students understand the learning material but also to encourage them to engage more actively with their environment. This approach enables students with special needs to learn while simultaneously developing their social and physical skills in an integrated manner.

"Many media are used to stimulate the children's motor skills, as we know that children with special needs tend to rely more on visual stimuli. Therefore, we use media such as cards, marbles, or attractive images, so the students are more active and interested during learning," said a Special Education Support Teacher (GPK) at SD Negeri Melayu 11.

As Novitasari (2019) pointed out, the development of children's motor skills is influenced by several key aspects that cannot be ignored. In motor learning, crucial aspects include physical strength, cardiovascular endurance, explosive power, speed, body endurance, agility, balance, reaction time, and coordination skills. All these elements play an essential role in supporting the optimization of motor skills in children.

In this context, Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) engage students in activities such as bead stringing to help develop their motor skills. The GPK explains to the students that the goal of this activity is for them to be able to dress independently without assistance. During the learning process, it is essential for GPK to adjust the delivery method based on each student's ability. Patience is a key factor in conveying the material, as each child has a different level of understanding. Therefore, GPK needs to use simple and understandable language and ensure that the student fully grasps the information provided. Additionally, the material is delivered in a relaxed manner to maintain a positive mood and ensure that the students feel comfortable during the learning process.

Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) utilize various learning resources in the teaching process, including textbooks. Moreover, they also use different teaching media to support learning activities, such as magnets to introduce the concept of magnetism, flashcards to help children recognize letters, and puzzles and balls. The goal is to make learning more diverse, allowing children to understand new concepts better.

Learning Strategies Implemented to Enhance Literacy Interest Among Students with Special Needs

Reading and writing are two essential elements of literacy activities. Literacy skills are a primary focus for gaining knowledge and abilities in other areas. Along with this, one of the fundamental skills students must possess to develop their other talents is the ability to read. A literacy program based on habits is implemented gradually in the classroom (Rohmah, 2023).

Pratiwi and Lestari (2020) explained that the learning process is divided into three main stages: introductory activities, core activities, and closing activities. The introductory stage aims to create a conducive environment for learning, allowing students to prepare adequately and engage in the learning process optimally.

"I often consult and discuss with the classroom teacher about what learning strategies are suitable for children with special needs," said a Special Education Support Teacher (GPK) at SD Negeri Melayu 11.

According to the GPK survey, there is no need for questions about the students' conditions, as the GPK can analyze them independently. As a Special Education Support Teacher, it is crucial to conduct apperception before starting the lesson. Apperception is an activity that connects the previously learned material with what will be taught next. This aligns with Rochmah's (2018) view, which states that an effective method to begin the learning process for students with special needs is through apperception. In this case, the process helps children understand new concepts by linking them to their previous knowledge or experiences.

The new material delivered by the Special Education Support Teacher (GPK) must be deeply understood by the student. To ensure this, the GPK typically evaluates the child's comprehension by asking questions related to the material that has been taught. However, in certain situations, the Special Education Support Teacher may not always ask questions, as it is tailored to each child's condition. In some instances, students with special needs may be reluctant to learn, so the teacher needs to employ varied teaching methods that align with the students' interests and needs (Muhammad, 2021).

When delivering material, the Special Education Support Teacher (GPK) adjusts the approach based on each child's understanding ability. Therefore, the GPK needs to find effective strategies to ensure that the material can be well received by the students in those conditions. One of the main strategies applied is patience, which is crucial for ensuring that the learning process for students with special needs proceeds smoothly.

Teaching media for students with special needs are highly varied, and their effectiveness greatly depends on

the teacher's role in selecting and applying innovative media to maintain student interest during the learning process (Qorimah & Abduh, 2021). Moreover, Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) also use various learning resources to support smooth learning, including supplementary books outside of those provided by the regular classroom teacher (S. A. Putri et al., 2019). There is an urgent need to develop learning media that can facilitate the learning process that hones skills in the 5.0 society era (Suriansyah, 2023).

The final stage of the learning process is evaluation. Learning evaluation is a systematic process of gathering information about the effectiveness of learning activities, with the goal of helping students achieve the established objectives optimally. Therefore, each evaluation stage should be directed at achieving better results than before (Kusumaningrum & Abduh, 2022). In the evaluation of learning, the GPK conducts question-and-answer sessions to assess the understanding of students with special needs (CWSN) regarding the material taught. If the student can answer the questions correctly, it indicates that they have understood the material. Conversely, if the student struggles to answer, it indicates that they have not mastered the material.

Obstacles and Solutions

Numerous studies have shown that the main challenge in implementing inclusive education is the lack of Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) in schools. This issue often leads to difficulties for students with special needs in following the learning process effectively. The absence of GPKs negatively affects the school's ability to meet the educational needs of children with special needs, thus preventing them from receiving the necessary support for optimal learning (Agustina, 2021; Hartadi, 2019; Pardede, 2020; Savitri, 2020; Tejena, 2022; Warminda, 2022).

Therefore, the government must ensure that there are enough Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) to meet the needs of inclusive education. Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) play a vital role in coordinating and collaborating with related parties, preparing diagnostic assessment instruments, providing individual services for children with special needs, and assisting regular teachers in the learning process (Directorate of Basic Education, 2011). As Agusta (2021) explained, the goal of education includes the development and growth of all aspects of an individual. Children with special needs include those with physical, emotional, mental, social disabilities, learning difficulties, autism, motor disorders, or exceptional talents (Directorate of Basic Education, 2011). The main challenge of inclusive education is that societal perceptions have not fully supported it. Regular schools are expected to be more proactive in accommodating

these needs, although there is still skepticism from parents about whether schools can provide adequate facilities and teachers.

In practice, inclusive education is often misunderstood as integration, where students are expected to adjust to the existing school environment. This misunderstanding results in a lack of special services for students with special needs in regular schools. This makes it difficult for teachers to provide adequate attention to students with special needs, which may lead to them becoming targets of bullying, while parents feel dissatisfied with the situation (Sakti, 2020).

Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) face various challenges when the curriculum and teaching methods are not tailored to the students' abilities, learning speeds, difficulties, and interests. Students with special needs should not be forced to achieve competencies beyond their capacity or have to wait for other students who learn more slowly. Fitri (2022) states that failure with one teaching method does not mean that the students will fail with another method. Curriculum adaptation aims to meet the needs of students based on their individual characteristics, thus resulting in more personalized learning programs. This collaborative learning process involves subject teachers, GPK, guidance counselors, and class teachers to achieve optimal learning outcomes (Ningrum, 2019).

Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that the use of teaching methods involving media has a significant impact on improving literacy interest among students with special needs. This research emphasizes the critical role of media in the learning process, where children with special needs require the assistance of media to facilitate their understanding of the material being taught. These learning media not only help in delivering information more clearly and engagingly, but they also enhance student involvement and motivation to actively participate in literacy activities. Therefore, the use of media in education becomes a key factor that can support the development of literacy in children with special needs, making it easier for them to understand and enjoy the learning provided.

The implementation of inclusive education is similar to general education. In this context, the Special Education Support Teacher (GPK) is responsible for teaching inclusive students. The role of the GPK includes teaching inclusive students and developing Individualized Education Programs (IEP). The IEP is a program designed by the GPK to adjust the Basic Competencies (KD) according to the individual needs of each student. The IEP consists of three main components: introductory activities, core activities, and

closing activities. The GPK has carried out all of these activities systematically in accordance with the established guidelines.

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The research was conceptualized by Authors 1, 2, and 3. The methodology, data analysis, and manuscript writing were conducted by Author 1, while Authors 2, 3, 4, and 5 contributed to the review and supervision of the study.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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