



The impact of teachers' inclusive attitudes on the acceptance of students with special needs: A gender perspective

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Article Info	Abstract
Keywords: Acceptance of children with special needs; teachers' inclusive attitudes; perception of inclusive attitudes.	This study examines the relationship between students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes and their acceptance of students with special educational needs (SEN), with gender as a moderating variable. Recognizing the importance of fostering inclusive school environments, this study employed a quantitative correlational design involving 307 students from three inclusive public junior high schools in Semarang, Indonesia. Data were collected using adapted versions of the Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education Scale (AIES) and the Attitude Survey Towards Inclusive Education (ASIE), which demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .976$ and $.925$, respectively). Data were analyzed using Hayes' PROCESS Macro Model 1 (version 5.0) in SPSS. The results revealed a significant positive association between perceived teacher inclusivity and students' acceptance of peers with special educational needs ($\beta = 9.743$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, gender significantly moderated this relationship ($\beta = 0.472$, $p < .05$). The overall model explained 88.22% of the variance in students' acceptance ($R^2 = .8822$). These findings highlight the importance of perceived teacher inclusivity in promoting peer acceptance within inclusive educational settings and suggest that this relationship varies by gender. The study underscores the need for school-based interventions that strengthen inclusive teaching practices while considering gender-related differences in students' social attitudes.

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Introduction

Inclusive education is an educational approach that ensures every child, including children with special needs, has the opportunity to learn in the same environment as their peers. This system emphasizes the importance of acceptance, equality, and the recognition of individual diversity within the school context (Putri et al., 2021). However, in practice, numerous challenges persist regarding the social attitudes of regular students toward children with special needs, including discriminatory behavior, rejection, and bullying in the school environment (Damayanto et al., 2020; Haryono et al., 2015; Nurlia, 2025).

Several studies have shown that students' social acceptance of children with special needs is a crucial component in the success of inclusive education (Damastuti & Rapisa, 2021; De Boer & Pijl, 2016). Previous findings have often treated social acceptance as a standalone variable and have not explored in depth the factors

that predict it—such as students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes. Teachers' attitudes play a pivotal role in shaping a conducive social environment where inclusivity can flourish, which is later reflected in the behavior of regular students toward their peers with special needs (Schaub & Lütolf, 2024) .

Hayes et al., (2004) defines acceptance as the act of fully embracing an event or individual, including the active acknowledgment of the presence of children with special needs. According to Leary, (2010) , acceptance occurs when an individual tolerates the presence of others and actively builds relationships based on respect and understanding of others' conditions. The positive impacts of acceptance in a social environment include a sense of safety, enhanced self-concept, improved social skills, and better personal adjustment (Hurlock, 1997) . In contrast, social rejection can lead children with special needs to experience loneliness, low self-esteem, and declining academic performance.

Within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), acceptance of children with special needs is shaped by the interaction among students' attitudes toward inclusion, subjective norms within the social environment, and perceived behavioral control in establishing relationships with them. These three components are shaped by students' direct experiences in the school setting, including peer interactions and the observation of teachers' behavior. When students perceive that accepting children with special needs is a positive act, supported by inclusive school norms, and feel capable of doing so, their intention to behave inclusively increases. In this process, teachers' inclusive attitudes function as a key source of subjective norms and behavioral models that shape students' beliefs, thereby strengthening their intention and behavior in socially and emotionally accepting children with special needs.

Teachers' inclusive attitudes play a critical role in shaping students' acceptance of children with special needs. Schaub & Lütolf, (2024) emphasize that teachers who create inclusive classroom environments and possess competencies in working with children with special needs are able to foster more positive social treatment. In line with the theory of attitude formation by (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) , attitudes develop through social interactions that influence individual beliefs and behaviors. In this context, teachers' inclusive attitudes not only influence how they treat children with special needs but also serve as role models for regular students in developing acceptance. The findings of Riana et al., (2021) support this, showing that teachers who consistently demonstrate inclusive attitudes are more likely to create a classroom climate that encourages acceptance and appreciation of diversity.

Perception is the process of interpreting information to form judgments about an object. Attitude is a positive or negative evaluation that arises from an individual's beliefs about the consequences of a particular behavior (Ajzen, 2005). Teachers' inclusive attitudes can be viewed as behavioral beliefs that influence students' own inclusive attitudes, which in turn shape their intention to show acceptance toward children with special needs. In other words, students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes become the foundation for the formation of social acceptance toward children with special needs within the school.

This study examines students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes and investigates the moderating role of gender in the relationship between these attitudes and students' acceptance of children with special needs. The study is situated within the context of inclusive education at junior high schools in Semarang City. It also highlights how gender may moderate the relationship between perceived inclusive teacher attitudes and the acceptance of children with special needs, thus offering additional insights into inclusive education research.

The objective of this study is to analyze the influence of students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes on the acceptance of children with special needs and to determine whether gender moderates this relationship. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of school-based guidance and counseling services as well as inclusive education policies at the junior secondary school level.

Method

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design to examine the influence of students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes on the acceptance of children with special needs, with gender as a moderating variable. The objective of this research was to determine whether students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes affect their acceptance of children with special needs, and whether this relationship is moderated by students' gender.

The population of this study consisted of students enrolled in public junior high schools implementing inclusive education programs in Semarang City. The sampling technique used was multistage random sampling, which involves a combination of two or more different sampling methods. The first stage employed quota sampling to classify public junior high schools in Semarang City based on the length of time they have implemented inclusive education. In the second stage, cluster random sampling was used to select the schools

to be included in the research sample. Based on this procedure, data were collected from 307 students across three public junior high schools implementing inclusive education programs in Semarang City. Data collection was conducted using a closed-ended questionnaire based on a four-point Likert scale.

The instrument used to measure students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes was adapted from the Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education Scale (AIES) developed by Sakiz, Ergün, and Göksu (2023). The instrument consisted of 30 statement items. The results of the construct validity test indicated that all items met the validity criteria, with correlation coefficients exceeding the critical value of 0.254. The instrument demonstrated excellent internal consistency, as indicated by a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.976.

To measure the acceptance of children with special needs, a psychological scale was adapted from the Attitude Survey Towards Inclusive Education Scale (ASIE) developed by (de Boer et al., 2011). This instrument consisted of 14 statement items. The construct validity test showed that all items met the required validity assumptions, with correlation coefficients above 0.254 and a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.925, indicating excellent reliability.

Data analysis in this study was conducted using parametric statistical tests with SPSS version 26 and the PROCESS Macro version 5.0. The analysis involved applying Hayes' Model 1 to examine the influence of students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes on their acceptance of children with special needs and the moderating role of gender.

Result and Discussion

The research instrument was distributed to 307 regular students across different grade levels in inclusive schools that served as the research sites. Each student was asked to complete a questionnaire measuring their perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes and their level of acceptance toward children with special needs.

Descriptive analysis revealed that the average student perception of teachers' inclusive attitudes was moderate ($M = 78.93$, $SD = 15.8$), indicating that students generally perceived their teachers as demonstrating inclusive behaviors in daily interactions, though not consistently at high intensity. Meanwhile, the average score for student acceptance of children with special needs fell into the high category ($M = 37.21$, $SD = 5.97$), suggesting that, in general, students exhibited a strong tendency to accept the presence of children with special needs within both social and learning environments. These findings are presented in detail in Table 1 and serve as the foundation for further inferential analysis examining the relationships between variables.

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation and Variable Categories

<i>Variabel</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Category</i>
Perception of Teachers' Inclusive Attitudes	78.93	15.8	Moderate
Acceptance of CSN	37.21	5.97	High

To further examine the influence of students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes on the acceptance of CSN, as well as the moderating role of gender in this relationship, Hayes' Model 1 was tested, as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing Results

Predictor	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>
Acceptance of CSN					0.939	0.882	756.64
Perception of Teachers' Inclusive Attitudes	9.743	13.563	0.000	0.718			
Gender	1.115	0.909	0.036	1.226			
Interaction X-W	0.472	1.057	0.041	0.446			

Based on the hypothesis testing results presented in Table 2, students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes were found to have a positive and significant effect on the acceptance of children with special needs ($\beta = 9.743$, $SE = 0.718$, $p < 0.001$). Gender, as a moderating variable, also demonstrated a significant influence on the acceptance of children with special needs ($\beta = 1.115$, $SE = 1.226$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the interaction between the perception of teachers' inclusive attitudes and gender ($X \times W$) showed a significant effect ($\beta = 0.472$; $SE = 0.446$, $p < 0.05$). The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.882, indicating that the model

accounted for 88.22% of the variance in the acceptance of children with special needs, with an F-value of 756.64, suggesting that the regression model was statistically significant overall.

The findings emphasize the important role of teachers' inclusive attitudes in fostering students' acceptance of peers with special educational needs (SEN). This finding aligns with Mariyam and Kurniawati (2022), who demonstrated a significant association between inclusive teaching strategies and peer acceptance of students with SEN. Similarly, Yang et al. (2024) revealed that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion were associated with their intentions and teaching behaviors, which subsequently contributed to students' social and academic competencies. Furthermore, Schnepel et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of teachers' positive attitudes and collaboration in implementing inclusive classroom practices, while Weiss et al. (2026) emphasized that teachers' approaches to fairness and classroom interactions shape students' responses toward peers requiring additional support. Collectively, these findings suggest that teachers' inclusive attitudes and practices may promote positive classroom norms, strengthen peer relationships, and encourage equitable social participation among students with SEN (Mariyam & Kurniawati, 2022; Schnepel et al., 2025; Weiss et al., 2026; Yang et al., 2024).

Students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes play an important role in fostering acceptance of peers with special educational needs (SEN). According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, subjective norms influence individuals' behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991). Teachers who demonstrate fairness, empathy, and respect for diversity may establish positive classroom norms that encourage inclusive interactions. Lenkeit et al. (2024) found associations between teachers' and students' inclusive attitudes in certain classroom contexts, while Barth and Grütter (2024) demonstrated that inclusive classroom norms positively predicted students' expectations of including peers with learning difficulties. These findings suggest that teachers' inclusive attitudes may strengthen peer acceptance by shaping students' social expectations and encouraging respectful interactions (Barth & Grütter, 2024; Lenkeit et al., 2024).

The finding that students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes significantly influence their own inclusive behavior and acceptance of children with special needs underscores the strategic role of teachers in shaping a school's inclusive culture. According to the theoretical model by Sakız et al., (2024) teachers' inclusive attitudes are formed through a combination of personal beliefs, conceptual understanding, professional experience, and support from the working environment. Teachers who possess strong knowledge of inclusive education, have received relevant training, and enjoy adequate institutional support are more likely to consistently exhibit pedagogical behaviors that promote diversity. These behaviors are observed and internalized by students, thereby shaping inclusive attitudes and acceptance of children with special needs as part of the classroom's social norms. Thus, improving the quality of teacher–student interaction in the context of inclusion not only enhances academic success but also fosters a socially inclusive and supportive classroom climate.

The practical implications of these findings emphasize that increasing the acceptance of children with special needs in schools greatly depends on the inclusive attitudes demonstrated by teachers in their daily classroom practices. Teachers who create a learning environment that is fair, supportive, and respectful of diversity help shape students' positive perceptions of children with special needs, which in turn enhances their social acceptance. Pasing Sih (2024) affirmed that inclusive classroom management strategies implemented by teachers, even in early childhood education, contribute to the development of a classroom climate that supports acceptance of differences. In addition, Hastiani et al. (2014) highlighted that collaboration among teachers—particularly between subject teachers and school counselors—can strengthen students' interpersonal interactions, including their understanding and acceptance of peers with special needs. Further supporting this implication, Nurshobah (2021) reported that interventions such as Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) are effective in enhancing the self-esteem of slow learners, which in turn helps improve their social positioning within the school environment. These findings underscore the importance of the roles of both teachers and counselors in providing targeted psychosocial support, ensuring that acceptance of children with special needs is not merely superficial but genuinely emerges from healthy interactions and perceptions. Therefore, strengthening teachers' inclusive attitudes through systemic school support, continuous professional development, and cross-role collaboration represents a strategic step toward cultivating a sustainable culture of acceptance in inclusive education settings.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, this study confirms that students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive attitudes significantly influence their acceptance of children with special needs, with gender moderating the strength of

this relationship. These findings indicate that inclusive attitudes demonstrated by teachers—through fair treatment, empathy, and appreciation of diversity—not only contribute to a supportive classroom climate but also serve as a source of value internalization that students adopt in their interactions with children with special needs.

The practical implication of these findings emphasizes the importance of strengthening teachers' inclusive attitudes as a fundamental foundation for fostering the acceptance of children with special needs. This enhancement can be achieved through instructional practices that promote fairness and openness, the development of a learning environment that embraces diversity, and teachers' exemplary behavior in fostering equitable social interactions with all students. Therefore, the consistent development of teachers' inclusive attitudes will promote the establishment of a school culture that supports the acceptance of children with special needs, while also taking into account the dynamic role of gender in the internalization of inclusive values.

Author Contributions Statement

Jessica Agustin Sailana: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft. **Awalya:** Supervision, Methodology, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Sunawan:** Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Khairuddin Khaikhah:** Data curation, Formal analysis. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Declaration of Generative AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT to assist with language editing and improving the readability of the manuscript. The authors reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the published article.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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