

The Existence of Children with Special Needs in Non-Inclusive Public Elementary Schools: A Study of Public Elementary Schools in Gladagsari District

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Abstract

The presence of children with special needs (CSN) in non-inclusive public elementary schools has become increasingly visible due to the limited number of inclusive schools and the growing demand for equitable education services. This study aims to describe the existence of CSN in non-inclusive public elementary schools in Gladagsari District based on 2025 recapitulation data. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using secondary data collected in July and November through documentation and data compilation techniques. Data were analyzed using a descriptive-comparative method to examine changes in the number, distribution, and types of special needs identified. The findings indicate an increase in identified CSN, with slow learners as the dominant category. This trend reflects improved awareness among schools; however, it has not been supported by adequate educational readiness, including the provision of special education services and adaptive learning strategies, highlighting the need for stronger inclusive education policies.

Keywords: *children with special needs, educational inclusion, elementary education, non-inclusive schools*

Abstrak

Keberadaan anak berkebutuhan khusus (ABK) di sekolah dasar negeri noninklusi semakin terlihat seiring dengan terbatasnya jumlah sekolah inklusi dan meningkatnya kebutuhan layanan pendidikan yang berkeadilan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan eksistensi ABK di sekolah dasar negeri noninklusi di Kecamatan Gladagsari berdasarkan data rekapitulasi tahun 2025. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan memanfaatkan data sekunder yang dikumpulkan pada bulan Juli dan November melalui teknik dokumentasi dan kompilasi data. Analisis data dilakukan secara deskriptif-komparatif untuk mengkaji perubahan jumlah, persebaran, dan jenis kebutuhan khusus yang teridentifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan jumlah ABK, dengan kategori slow learner sebagai yang paling dominan. Temuan ini mencerminkan meningkatnya kesadaran sekolah, namun belum diimbangi dengan kesiapan layanan pendidikan yang memadai, termasuk penyediaan layanan pendidikan khusus dan strategi pembelajaran adaptif, sehingga diperlukan penguatan kebijakan pendidikan inklusif.

Kata kunci: *anak berkebutuhan khusus, pendidikan dasar, Pendidikan Inklusi, sekolah non inklusi*



INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right of every child without exception, including children with special needs (CSN). The principle of education for all emphasizes that the education system must accommodate the diversity of learners in terms of abilities, backgrounds, and learning needs. In this context, inclusive education is considered an approach that ensures the fulfillment of every child's right to education. However, the reality in the field shows that the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia still faces various limitations, particularly at public elementary schools that have not been formally designated as inclusive schools. This is in line with the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 48 of 2023, which emphasizes that every citizen has the right to proper education without discrimination and that educational institutions are required to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities.

The presence of CSN in non-inclusive public elementary schools is an increasingly observable phenomenon. The limited number of inclusive schools and special schools, geographical constraints, and socio-economic considerations of parents encourage many CSN to enroll in nearby regular schools. As a result, non-inclusive public elementary schools have become educational spaces that are factually filled with students with diverse learning needs, despite lacking structural readiness for inclusive education systems.

The existence of CSN in non-inclusive schools should not be understood merely as an administrative issue or student data collection. It reflects recognition of CSN as subjects of education who possess rights, potential, and specific learning needs. Ainscow (2005) states that inclusion is related to how education systems respond to student diversity in a fair and effective manner. This implies that the presence of CSN in regular schools should be accompanied by adjustments in the learning system, rather than expecting students to fully adapt to existing structures.

In practice, non-inclusive public elementary schools often lack adequate resources to provide appropriate educational services for CSN. Teachers are required to manage heterogeneous classrooms without sufficient training in inclusive education. Friend and Bursuck (2019) emphasize that the success of education for students with special needs depends heavily on teachers' readiness to implement differentiated and adaptive learning strategies. However, in many non-inclusive schools, teaching still focuses on the general curriculum, resulting in the insufficient accommodation of students' individual needs.

This condition may lead to various challenges for both students and teachers. CSN who do not receive appropriate support may experience learning difficulties, decreased motivation, and social-emotional barriers. Meanwhile, teachers face professional pressure due to limited competencies and systemic support. Hallahan, Kauffman, and Pullen (2018) argue that without adequate support, students with special needs in regular classrooms are at risk of academic underachievement and social marginalization.

Empirical data play an important role in understanding this phenomenon. In Gladagsari District, CSN data are collected periodically and documented in the 2025 Recapitulation of Children with Special Needs. The data show that CSN are distributed across various public elementary schools with diverse categories, such as slow learners, students with intellectual disabilities, and those with behavioral disorders. Data collection was conducted in July and November 2025, providing insights into the dynamics of identification within one academic year.

A comparison of the July and November data indicates an increase in the number of identified CSN. This increase suggests improved school awareness in identifying CSN. However, this improvement has not been accompanied by adequate educational readiness. Administrative data collection does not necessarily align with the fulfillment of students' learning rights. Many non-inclusive schools still expect CSN to adapt to the

regular learning system, whereas inclusive education emphasizes the need for the system to adapt to students' needs (UNESCO, 2017).

In the context of elementary education, the presence of CSN in non-inclusive schools presents both challenges and opportunities. Challenges arise from the lack of internal policies, human resources, and facilities that support inclusive practices. On the other hand, the presence of CSN offers opportunities for schools to develop more humane and equitable educational practices. Sunardi (2019) states that inclusive education benefits not only CSN but all students, as it fosters empathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity.

Although many studies have examined inclusive education in primary schools, most focus on formally designated inclusive schools (Hidayat et al., 2022; Ainscow, 2020). Other studies highlight teacher readiness and differentiated instruction strategies (Mauliddiyah & Permata, 2023; Caballero, 2024). However, research specifically addressing the existence of CSN in non-inclusive public elementary schools based on empirical school data remains limited.

Research GAP, Previous studies also tend to frame CSN within program implementation rather than examining their actual presence in schools that are not structurally prepared for inclusion. In fact, the increasing number of CSN in non-inclusive schools reflects a gap between inclusive education policies and their implementation in practice (UNESCO, 2020). Therefore, there is a pressing need for studies that bridge this gap.

This study offers novelty by examining the existence of CSN in non-inclusive public elementary schools using real data collected in two periods, July and November 2025, and linking these findings to the readiness of educational services. It also provides empirical evidence of the gap between identification processes and the education system's capacity to respond to students' needs.

The focus of this study is to examine the existence of CSN in non-inclusive public elementary schools in Gladagsari District based on 2025 data. The research questions are: (1) what is the profile of CSN existence based on the July and November data, and (2) what are the implications for school readiness in providing educational services? The study aims to describe the existence of CSN and provide empirical insights that can inform the development of more inclusive educational policies and practices at the elementary level.

METHOD

This study is an empirical research employing a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen to obtain an in-depth understanding of the existence of children with special needs (CSN) in non-inclusive public elementary schools based on the available data. The research was conducted using a documentation study method on CSN data in Gladagsari District.

The research data consist of secondary data derived from the 2025 Recapitulation of Children with Special Needs in Gladagsari District, which includes two data collection periods, namely July and November 2025. The documents contain information on the number of CSN and the types of special needs identified in each public elementary school.

Data collection was carried out through documentation study by reviewing and recording relevant data in accordance with the research objectives. The data collection instrument was a recording sheet used to classify data based on schools, data collection periods, and types of special needs.

Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-comparative technique through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was performed by selecting and focusing on relevant data. Data display was presented in the

form of summary tables and narrative descriptions to illustrate the condition of CSN existence. Conclusion drawing was conducted by interpreting the results of the analysis to obtain meaningful insights into the existence of CSN in non-inclusive public elementary schools.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results show that children with special needs (CSN) are distributed across all non-inclusive public elementary schools in Gladagsari District. Data collected in July and November 2025 indicate variations in the number and types of special needs across schools, as well as an increasing trend in the number of identified CSN in November. These findings suggest that the presence of CSN in non-inclusive schools is an ongoing educational reality.

Table 1. Comparison of the Number of CSN Based on Data Collection Periods

Data Collection Period	Number of Schools	Total CSN Identified	Dominant Types of Special Needs
July 2025	20 Non-Inclusive Public Elementary Schools	55 students	Slow learners, intellectual disabilities
November 2025	20 Non-Inclusive Public Elementary Schools	67 students	Slow learners, behavioral disorders

Table 1 shows an increase in the number of identified CSN in November compared to July 2025. This increase indicates that schools have begun to develop greater awareness in identifying and documenting CSN. However, this increase does not necessarily reflect the readiness of schools to provide inclusive educational services.

The most commonly identified category of special needs is slow learners. CSN in this category generally participate in regular classroom learning without curriculum modification or adaptive instructional strategies. This condition suggests that the presence of CSN in non-inclusive schools remains largely administrative and has not been fully accommodated pedagogically.

Discussion

The findings in non-inclusive public elementary schools in Gladagsari District indicate that the identification and presence of CSN increased from July to November 2025, but this has not been accompanied by adequate educational service readiness. These findings are consistent with various national and international studies on inclusive education over the past decade.

Several studies highlight that one of the main challenges in inclusive education is human resource readiness, particularly teacher competence and collaborative support within schools. Research by Abdillah et al. emphasizes that inclusive education implementation still faces barriers such as limited facilities, insufficient teacher training, and a lack of flexible curricula to accommodate individual student needs. These challenges hinder the effective integration of CSN in regular classroom settings (Hidayat et al., 2025).

Recent studies also underscore the importance of collaboration among teachers, parents, and educational experts in successfully implementing inclusive practices. The

literature suggests that the involvement of multiple stakeholders improves the accuracy of early identification and supports the development of more responsive learning strategies (Muslimah & Darmayanti, 2024).

This is further supported by studies indicating that differentiated instruction strategies, creative learning media, and supportive learning environments are essential for enhancing both academic participation and social skills of CSN in elementary schools. Approaches such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), along with collaboration among teachers, parents, and professionals, are significant determinants of successful inclusive education (Mauliddiyah & Permata, 2025).

In this context, the increase in the number of identified CSN in Gladagsari should not be viewed merely as administrative data collection, but also as part of a systemic effort to improve identification processes and school responses to students' needs. However, according to Rizqi et al. (2025), schools attempting to meet the needs of CSN often face limitations in facilities and lack comprehensive individual need assessments, resulting in partial and fragmented services.

Furthermore, policy reviews on inclusive education reveal that effective implementation requires adjustments in educational policies and structures. Studies reviewing inclusive education policies in Indonesia indicate that, although policies exist, there remains a significant gap between policy and practice, particularly in terms of resources, curriculum, and technical support at the school level (Somad et al., 2025).

The findings of this study are also aligned with international literature emphasizing that inclusive education should be understood as a continuous process. It should not stop at identification but must encompass all aspects of education, from curriculum planning to daily instructional practices. Therefore, school community participation and continuous professional development are essential factors in achieving effective inclusion (Caballero, 2024).

Although this study relies on secondary data, the findings are supported by previous research indicating that teachers in non-inclusive schools often face difficulties in handling CSN due to limited competencies and systemic support (Rizqi et al., 2025; Caballero, 2024). Other studies also show that the involvement of school principals and parents plays a crucial role in supporting the success of educational services for CSN (Muslimah & Darmayanti, 2024). This suggests that the presence of CSN requires not only administrative identification but also collaborative support from multiple stakeholders.

In conclusion, the findings of this study strengthen empirical evidence that the existence of CSN in non-inclusive public elementary schools is not merely a matter of statistical data, but also an indicator of the education system's readiness to respond to student diversity. The transition from administrative data collection to genuine inclusive educational practices requires a multi-level approach, including government policy support, continuous teacher training, provision of adequate facilities, and cross-stakeholder collaboration.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study indicates that the existence of children with special needs (CSN) in non-inclusive public elementary schools in Gladagsari District is characterized by an increase in both the number and variety of special needs, based on data from July and November 2025. These findings address the research questions by demonstrating that CSN are indeed present and distributed across all schools, while also showing a dynamic improvement in identification within one academic year.

The implications of these findings highlight the need to enhance school readiness in providing inclusive educational services, particularly through strengthening teacher

competencies, providing special education support teachers, and developing adaptive learning strategies.

This study has limitations as it relies solely on secondary data without being supported by primary data such as interviews or direct observations. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ a mixed-methods approach involving teachers, school principals, and parents to obtain a more comprehensive understanding.

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