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## **THE NEEDS OF PICTURE BOOKS FOR FOSTERING DISABILITY AWARENESS AND PEER ACCEPTANCE IN INCLUSIVE PRIMARY SCHOOL**

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### **Abstract**

Having high disability awareness can increase acceptance and friendship in inclusive schools. Picture books are a medium that can foster disability awareness. This study aims to determine the needs of picture books for fostering disability awareness in regular students in inclusive schools. The study is a survey research and using questionnaires. Participants are 146 regular students and 6 classroom teachers in three inclusive primary schools in Surakarta. The results were analysed descriptively. The results show that the regular students want to learn about disability, interest with picture books, and willing to read the picture books. The classroom teachers are also interested and willing to use the book in class. This suggests that picture book about disability is needed for fostering disability awareness in inclusive schools.

**Keywords:** Picture books, disability awareness, peer acceptance, inclusive school, student with special needs.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Children's books are text written specifically for children to read (Kiefer & Huck, 2010, Susina, 2004). Children's literature is a story that fits with the intellectual and emotional development of children (Kurniawan, 2009). There are various types of children's books, such as books to begin on, picture books, traditional literature, modern fantasy, poetry, contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, nonfiction books, and biography (Susina, 2004; Kiefer & Huck, 2010; Naidoo & Bryant, 2007). One type of book that is close to the children is picture books.

Gill (2015) states that the term picture books used for a book of text and pictures have meaning. The purpose of the picture books is to convey complex information by using visual media (Nodelman, 2008). Picture books can provide information with stories and pictures. Picture books can be a medium for delivering various messages for children. Kiefer & Huck (2010) mention that the themes commonly used in picture books are family stories, frequent experiences, respect for diversity, stories about adults, nature, animals, fairy tales, humour, fantasy, social issues and the environment, even war and bad events. In appreciating its own diversity, a picture book can present stories of ethnic, racial, cultural, economic, and disability.

Picture books with disability themes can be used as a tool to raise awareness, understanding, and acceptance of children with special needs (Prater,

Dyches & Johnstun, 2006). According to Kiefer & Huck (2010), there are two benefits of reading stories about children with special needs for children. First, picture books about disability can provide a positive picture for children with special needs who read it. Second, to help non-special needs children develop a better understanding of the problems faced by special needs children.

Social acceptance and the desire for friendship is a common theme throughout many of the children's books (Tsumoto & Black, 2015). Picture books can be a medium that provides an understanding of disabilities in children, especially for students in inclusive schools. Picture books can play important role in creating a classroom environment where all children are accepted (Hollander, 2004). Use of selected children's books and book-related activities positively influenced children's attitudes toward disabilities (Trepanier-street & Romatowskf, 1996). The use of children's books incorporating characters who experience disability is recommended for raising awareness, increasing acceptance and understanding and facilitating inclusion in education (Cologon, 2013). So, picture books can be used for increasing disability awareness and peer acceptance in inclusive schools.

Disability awareness as a knowledge about the concepts of disabilities (Lau, Ho & Yau, 2016) When children have a good understanding and knowledge about disability, they can have good

behaviour and attitude towards children with special needs. Campbell et al. (2004) show that information about autism positively affect students' behavioural intentions, then providing knowledge about disability can increase awareness and peer acceptance. Because, bad behaviour and low peer acceptance toward students with special needs in inclusive school can be caused by low disability awareness (McGail & Rieger, 2013; Williamson, 2014). One of the important targets of inclusive education is the implementation of educational practices that teach respect to differences and similarities (Salend, 2011).

Use picture books for raising disability awareness to gain peer acceptance toward students with special needs in inclusive school it is a good idea. Unfortunately, in Indonesia, books with the theme of inclusion or disability for children are still limited. Books on the theme of disability mostly about education issues or parenting experiences. In fact, children's books, especially picture books, can be used as a teacher's tool to increase acceptance of children with special needs and understanding of disability.

Because of the limited picture books about disability and the importance of raising awareness of the study aims to identify the needs of children's books on a regular student in the inclusive primary school to improve their understanding, attitudes, their behaviour toward a student with special needs. This research is a preliminary research of development research that will be done.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a survey research. Participants in this study were 146 regular students in grades 4 and 5, as well as 6 class teachers at three inclusive primary schools in Surakarta, Center Java, Indonesia. Participants consisted of 69 boys and 77 girls. While consist of 5 female teachers and 1 male teacher.

The Survey used questionnaires. For students consists of 6 closed questionnaires. The questionnaire contains questions about the student's knowledge of disability, the desire to learn, interest in picture books, the experience of reading a book about disability, and willingness to read a book about disability. As for teachers using an open questionnaire that contains questions about the experience of students learning disability in the classroom, teacher's responses about picture books, willingness to use and advise teachers in developing picture books. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

There are 146 regular students who participated in the study. Questionnaires for students

assessing students' knowledge, whether students are interested in picture books and willingness to read picture books about disability.

The results of the questionnaire whether regular students know the definition of disability can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Knowledge about disability

Knowing the definition of students with special needs/disability	$\Sigma$	%
I Know	51	35%
I do not know	95	65%

Based on Table.1 known that there are many regular students who do not know the meaning of a student with a disability or special needs. Only 35% who claimed to know indicated that students had poor understanding and knowledge about disability. In fact, having knowledge of disability is important to understand and accept diversity.

Regular students have less knowledge about disability. However, they have a desire to learn about disability. This can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Desire to learn about disability

Desire to learn more about disability	$\Sigma$	%
Yes	135	92%
No	11	8%

Almost all regular students have a desire to know more about disability. While only 8% of students who are not interested in learning disability. This indicates the need to teach about disability to regular students.

The poor of knowledge may be due to their lack of reading about disability. Only a few of regular students who ever read books about disability. It can be seen in Table. 3

Table 3. Experience reading books about student with special needs / disability

Ever or never read a book about disability	$\Sigma$	%
I've read it	12	8%
Never read	134	92%

As many as 92% of students admitted that they never read a book about disability. Low percentage of students who have gained knowledge through reading shows a relation with a lack of awareness and low knowledge of disability. This indicates the need books with disability issues that can be read by children.

Regarding the type of book that corresponds to the age of primary school students, as many as 78% of students prefer books with images and colour rather than not. This can be seen in Table.4

Table 4. Type of books they liked

The type of books	$\Sigma$	%
Books with colour and picture	114	78%
Only text without picture	32	22%

Based on Table 4, it is known that regular students like picture books. This indicates that providing information about disability with picture books will be fun for the child. The students who interest with picture books is also very high. It can be seen from the percentage of students who like picture books in Table 5.

Table 5. Student' interest in picture books

Like/dislike the picture books	$\Sigma$	%
Like	125	86%
Dislike	21	14%

From Table 5, we know that 86% of regular students love picture books. This shows that children will more easily receive information through stories and pictures. Not only likes, regular students also want to read a book about disability. Table 6. Shows data of students who are willing to read picture books about disability

Table 6. Willingness to read picture books about disability.

Willingness to read picture books about disability.	$\Sigma$	%
Yes, I want to read that	129	88%
No.	17	12%

88% of students who want to read the picture books about disability show that the media is needed to improve the disability awareness and peer acceptance toward the student with special needs.

The results of the study found that two of six teachers have provided knowledge about disability in civic education. Both teachers mentioned that they taught students the importance of accepting the differences of every human being, included disability. This suggests that only 33% of teachers teach about disability in inclusive schools.

As much as six class teachers who answered the questionnaire said that the picture books interesting as a medium of learning. All teachers admitted to agreeing with the idea of using children's story books

as a medium in raising disability awareness. Also, all the teachers who answered the questionnaire replied that they were willing to use picture books about the disability that will be made.

The teachers also gave suggestions to make picture books about disability. The suggestions can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. Suggestions from teacher for a great picture book about disability

N	Suggestions
1	Students with special needs and regular students working together in the story
2	The story contains the message that every human being is equal
3	The stories relate to life in school. The font is large, colourful and the picture is interesting
4	The book will be able to increase knowledge about disability
5	Books that develop students' social skills
6	Books that contain daily life stories and appropriate with their age.

The findings are the basis of the need for a picture book to increase disability awareness. The majority of regular students who have never read the picture books about disability, interest with picture books, and want to read the picture books about disability can be the reason for the need of the picture books. The picture books can be raising their disability awareness, peer acceptance and friendship in primary inclusive school.

## Discussion

The results show that there are still many students who do not know the meaning ABK, which is about 65%. That is in line with the fact that only two teachers out of six teach about disability in the classroom. The lack of knowledge should overcome by giving them information. Then, 92% of regular students stated that they have a desire to learn about disability. In addition, only 8% of all students have ever read a book on disability. This confirms that there is a need for a medium that can educate regular students about disability and how to behave with them.

The conditions of the student with special needs that sometimes look different can arise many problems in inclusion schools. Perceptions of student with special needs that are not supported by good knowledge can lead to misconceptions. These misconceptions perpetuate prejudices and negative attitudes toward disability (Louari, 2013).

Attitudes of peers relating to the social participation of students with special needs, it's because of the negative attitudes in inclusive school may result in low acceptance by peers, few friendships, and bullying (de Boer, Pijl, Minnaert, 2012). Conversely, a great disability awareness, peer acceptance and friendships with peers influence positively children's behavior (Laws & Kelly, 2005; Skar, 2010)

A positive effect of intervention on student attitude, knowledge raises positive attitude (Kim, Park, and Snell, 2005; Vignes et al., 2009 and Tavares, 2011). One of the interventions that can be given is by reading books about disability (Prater, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006; Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009). A number of studies have discussed picture books that portray character with disabilities, which is good for increasing disability awareness (Matthews, 2008; Golos & Moses, 2011; Hughes, 2012; Golos, Moses, & Wolbers, 2012; Emmerson, Fu, Lendsay, & Brenna, 2014; Koss, 2015)

Picture books are chosen because a story with a disability character can build awareness and empathy for students with special needs (Hollander, 2004). Then, the children need character portrayals through illustrations or images (Woppeper, 2011). Children also love books with pictures. It is known that 78% of students prefer books that have pictures and are colorful than books containing only text. In addition, 86% of regular students also said that they like to read picture books. Thus, picture books are considered appropriate to be a medium in raising awareness. Because with the picture book with good quality drawing develops the story and depicts the realistic disability (Gonen et al, 2015).

The selection of picture books also gets support from all classroom teachers. The six teachers mentioned that they were interested and agreed with use picture books to raise awareness. They argue that children liked picture books, so it can be easy to give them 'message' on the story. This is in line with Woppeper (2011) which says that the picture in the picture book can enhance the story and depict disabilities appropriately.

The willingness of regular students to read picture books about disability is very high. As many as 88% of regular students say they are willing to read the picture book. All the classroom teachers said they were willing to use the picture book.

Preliminary research results show that regular students need a media that can provide knowledge and moral messages to improve disability awareness. The majority of students have never read a book about disability, most students love picture books, and also students and teachers who are willing to use the media became the foundation to develop picture

books. So it can be stated that the picture book is required for regular students in inclusive primary school.

### Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion, we conclude that children books especially picture books are needed to be a tool for fostering disability awareness and building friendships in inclusive schools. It can be seen from the students' lack of knowledge about disability, which needs to be improved. Fostering disability awareness can build peer acceptance, friendship, and decrease behaviour problem.

Children's books as a medium to learn about disability are also needed because they have a high desire to learn about it. 92% of students had not read picture books about disability, 78% prefer books with pictures and colour, and 86% who liked picture books may be the reason why there needs to create or develop a disability-themed picture book. In addition, 88% of students said they want to read picture books about disability and the support of the classroom teacher can be the reason to provide picture books for fostering disability awareness.

Finally, we will develop a picture book about disability, so students in inclusive primary school can better understand about disability. We suggest that authors or anyone who interested with children' world and disability can create more disability-themed books, especially in Indonesia. Because, there is still lack of a book on disability themed for children in this country. We also recommend the use of picture books with discussions to foster disability awareness and building friendship in inclusive schools.

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