

Systematic Literature Review of Social Support Conditions for Students with Special Needs in Inclusive Schools

Paryanto Paryanto¹, Wahyu Nanda Eka Saputra¹, Agus Supriyanto^{1*}

[1] Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia.

Abstract

Inclusive education requires a supportive learning environment that enables students with special needs to participate, develop, and achieve optimal educational outcomes. Social support from teachers, peers, families, school counselors, and policymakers plays a critical role in strengthening students' academic adjustment, self-efficacy, social interaction, and psychological well-being. This study aimed to identify, analyze, and synthesize previous research on social support for students with special needs in inclusive schools. A systematic literature review was conducted using the PRISMA framework to guide the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of relevant studies. Articles were retrieved from Google Scholar and selected based on relevance to the topic, publication period, and suitability for the research objectives. The final review included 17 relevant studies published between 2020 and 2025. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing through critical extraction and comparison of research findings. The results indicate that social support is a key predictor of successful inclusive education. Comprehensive support from teachers, peers, and families contributes to improved learning outcomes, self-efficacy, social skills, learning motivation, academic achievement, and psychological well-being among students with special needs. Inclusive school environments also help reduce social anxiety and foster empathy, acceptance, and positive interaction between students with special needs and regular students. These findings highlight the importance of systematic, structured, and collaborative efforts involving subject teachers, guidance and counseling teachers, school policymakers, peers, and families. This study implies that inclusive schools need to strengthen cross-sector collaboration and develop sustainable support systems to create friendly, responsive, and equitable learning environments for students with diverse needs.

Keywords: Social Support; Inclusive Schools; Students with Special Needs; Guidance and Counseling; Inclusive Education

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(*) Corresponding Author: Agus Supriyanto, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia,
Email: agus.supriyanto@bk.uad.ac.id



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INTRODUCTION

Students with special needs in inclusive schools, like other students in school, have the same rights as normal children in general (Baidowi et al., 2023; Tea et al., 2023). They need attention, care, love, appreciation, space for self-actualization, and several other things that embody the recognition of children with special needs as holistic human beings (Molina Roldán et al., 2021; Romadhoni & Nugroho, 2023a). The social environment's response to students with special needs influences how they view their self-concept (Carter, 2021; Julien, 2025). One form of social environment response needed to foster the self-concept and self-confidence of students with special needs is social support (Azizah et al., 2025a; Zetta & Rachim, 2021). In other words, matters related to social support for students with special needs need to be further examined to ensure they receive appropriate educational services.

The reality in schools is that there is a lack of social support for students with special needs. Support from teachers and peers has not been consistently provided to students with special needs, causing them to become isolated and receive less attention at school (Sabila et al., 2021). Teachers and peers still lack literacy about their needs (Putri et al., 2025). The learning process for students with special needs is still the same as for students in general (Dwi & Fathoni, 2025; Garrote et al., 2020; Suhana et al., 2021). Peers are still unable to show care and empathy, making it even more difficult for students with special needs to interact with their social environment (Calysta, 2025; Kleeberg-Niepage et al., 2024).

Furthermore, support facilities for students with special needs in inclusive schools are still minimal, hindering the development of the potential of students with special needs (Isnaini et al., 2025; Lafiana et al., 2022; Turnip et al., 2025). Collaboration skills between schools and parents in handling children with special needs also need to be improved in order to achieve the common goal of creating inclusive education that is equal for all (Rahmadani et al., 2025; Siti Nuraini et al., 2025). Therefore, inclusive schools require facilities and policies that collaborate in developing the quality of inclusive schools.

The importance of creating a learning environment that supports the growth and development of students with special needs has been recognized by various parties. The central and regional governments have issued policies related to inclusive education. In recent years, many studies have examined the importance of creating social support that supports these conditions. Social awareness in inclusive schools is very important to create a comfortable learning environment for students with special needs. Several studies have shown that positive social awareness from peers helps students with special needs to socialize easily (Angga Huky et al., 2024; Salsabila & Fitria, 2025). Teachers' good understanding of the needs of inclusive students also plays an important role in creating a comfortable learning atmosphere for students with special needs (Kholisna & Nugrahani, 2023; Siti Nuraini et al., 2025; Wulandari et al., 2024). Collaboration between parents and schools can also help realize inclusive schools as expected (Tejena et al., 2022). In addition, facilities and

infrastructure also greatly support the successful implementation of inclusive education (Posso-Pacheco et al., 2024). However, previous studies have tended to discuss social support separately, in terms of what efforts can be made and their impact. Therefore, this study offers a model of collaborative strategies between personnel who are directly and indirectly involved with students with special needs.

Previous research has tended to focus on separate concepts of social support from peers, teachers, parents, and the community in responding to students with special needs. This study takes a different perspective. The study will analyze existing research results and then synthesize the empirical and practical significance of social support in inclusive schools. The final results of this study are expected to inform the implementation of quality inclusive education. Collaborative efforts from various elements regarding the social support needed by students with special needs are an important part of this study. This research aims to provide deeper insight into the collaborative value that can be created by peers, teachers, parents, the community, and the government, which can create a friendly and empathetic learning environment and increase social awareness to provide social support to all students.

METHOD

Design

This type of research is a literature review study, which involves synthesizing or extracting existing literature collected in accordance with the research theme to obtain research topics using various different theories (Muslihati et al., 2023). This study aims to identify, analyze, and synthesize previous research on social support for students with special needs. This approach was taken as a form of concern for creating a safe, comfortable, and joyful school environment through a deep understanding of the importance of collaborative efforts that can be implemented in schools by several cross-sectors.

Data Collection

Data was collected using online searches via Google Scholar and the Garuda portal of the Ministry of Education and Culture. Keywords used in the literature search included social support, inclusion, and children with special needs. Digital searches are an effective and efficient data collection tool, especially for obtaining the latest research results related to the theme I am researching. The collected journals were then categorized. To ensure that the journals used were reliable in terms of quality and content, the author validated them by ensuring that they were indexed.

Literature Selection Procedure

In this literature review study, the researcher used five stages of research consisting of: (1) collecting literature, (2) selecting relevant literature, (3) reviewing literature with a focus on the research results section, (4) compiling the review results, (5) discussing the results of the literature review. The literature collection process was carried out using Google Scholar and Garuda Kemendikdasmen with the keywords social support, children with special needs, and inclusive schools. Meanwhile, the stages of literature collection and selection were carried out using the PRISMA model, which includes: (1) identification, (2) screening, and (3) inclusion (Muslihati et al., 2023).

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique used in this study's review results employed the Miles & Huberman model for literature data. The stages were as follows: (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, (3) conclusion drawing (Lestari & Irawati, 2020). The method used was to compare the sources of the literature review and then extract the main data in the form of research objectives and research results. After the data was collected, a comparison of the research results obtained from several literature sources was carried out. A critical review process was conducted to assess and identify gaps in the research. The results of the analysis were then presented in the form of tables and narratives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study involved literature from domestic and international research. In the study, the review involved 58 articles collected using Google Scholar and Garuda, then selected based on the criteria of research articles published from 2020 to 2025. Seventeen articles were found to be suitable in terms of title and research variables. Several pieces of literature found that the research subjects were teachers, established regulations, and available resources in inclusive schools. The types of research conducted varied, including descriptive qualitative research, correlational quantitative research, narrative qualitative research, literature reviews, and action research. All of the articles reviewed had the same ultimate goal, which was to support the realization of inclusive education in accordance with regulations established by the government. The details of the PRISMA results of the review are shown in Figure 1.

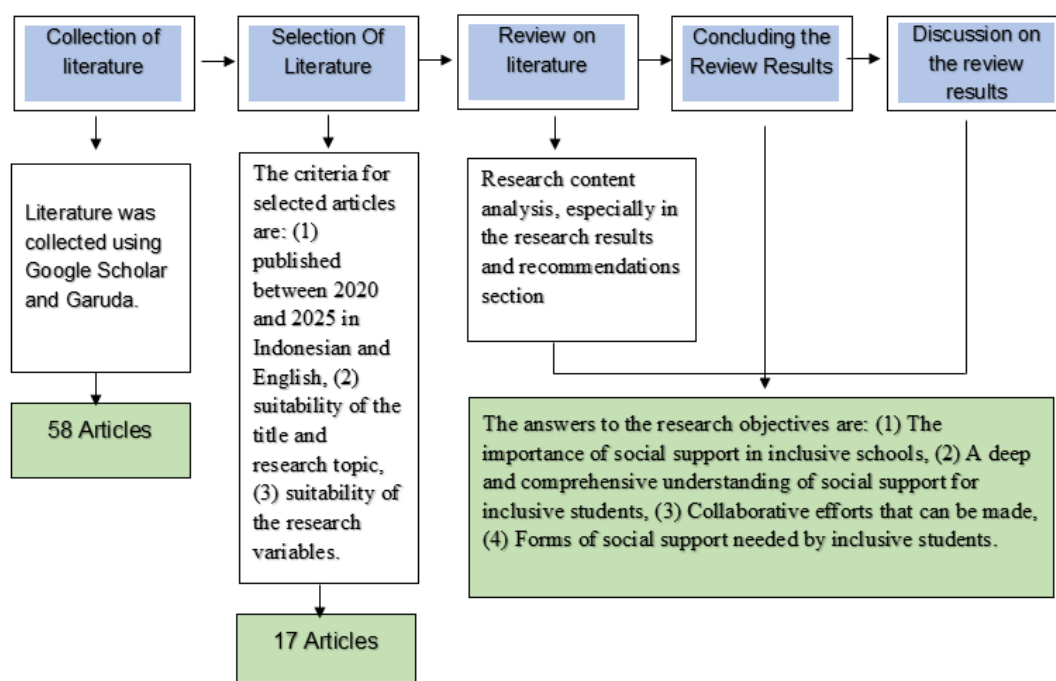


Figure 1. PRISMA Model Procedure in Systematic Literature Review

From the literature collected through Google Scholar and Garuda Kemendikdasmen searches, a total of 58 pieces of literature were collected. The collected articles were then analyzed for their suitability for this study. The analysis of the 58 pieces of literature resulted in 17 pieces of literature that were suitable for this study on social support and students with special needs in inclusive schools. The 17 pieces of literature are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Results of a Systematic Literature Review on Social Support Conditions for Inclusive Students

Number	Author and Year of Publication	Title Research	Results Research
1	(Prastiwi & Huwae, 2025)	Struggling Amidst Difficulties: A Portrait of Academic Well-Being Among Students with Disabilities at Inclusive Universities	Strong social support (family, friends, community) maintains positive well-being despite unequal access to facilities
2	(Zudeta et al., 2025)	Knowledge and Attitudes of Inclusive School Students Towards Children with Special Needs	The attitude of non-ABK students tends to be positive (75.5% want to be friends). However, basic knowledge about disabilities is still low.
3	Azizah et al. (2025)	Humanizing Humans in Inclusive Islamic Boarding Schools: The Role of Peer Support in Promoting Self-Efficacy and Independence	Peer support (emotional, instrumental, informational) significantly increases self-efficacy and independence.
4	(Calysta, 2025)	The Role of Peers in Relation to Slow Learners	Subtle exclusion was found; the role of peers was very limited in providing academic/emotional support.
5	(Sari et al., 2024)	Developing Social Integration of Santri with Special Needs Through the Isma Learning Therapy School (ILTS) Curriculum	The curriculum is effective in improving social integration (75%), social skills (80%), and independence (90%).
6	(Maryam et al., 2024)	Implementation of Inclusive Education for Students with Special Needs	Inclusive education improves the social skills and self-confidence of children with disabilities. The biggest challenges are the lack of parental support and social stigma.
7	(Romadhoni & Nugroho, 2023b)	Analysis of Students' Social Sensitivity Towards Students with Special Needs in Schools Providing Inclusive Education	Inclusive education fosters social sensitivity (empathy, sympathy, mutual assistance). Female students are more socially sensitive (90%) than males (82% in empathy).
8	(Saputri et al., 2024)	Analysis of Differences in Social Physique Anxiety Among Students with ADHD	The SPA levels of students with ADHD in inclusive schools were lower (33.7–35.2) than in

Number	Author and Year of Publication	Title Research	Results Research
9	(Wiyanto & Taluwara, 2024)	Adapting Inclusive Educational Models For Children With Physical Disabilities: Insights From A Special Needs School In Yogyakarta, Indonesia	special schools (39.8–41.3). Diverse inclusive environments act as a support that reduces anxiety. Emotional and social support should be part of tailored educational methods (alongside individual approaches and assistive devices).
10	(Hasanah et al., 2024)	Fostering Inclusivity: Strategies For Supporting Students with Special Needs in Mainstream Classrooms	Effective integrated strategies, including teacher training, adaptive teaching materials, and emotional/social support through peer support groups.
11	(Irwan Suryadi, 2023)	The Impact of Inclusive Education on the Participation and Achievement of Students with Special Needs	High student participation (average 4.25). Inclusion fosters a sense of belonging, increases self-confidence, and improves social skills.
12	(Mulyani et al., 2024)	Assistance For Children with Special Needs in Inclusive Schools Through Guidance and Counseling Services	BK (support) services result in increased self-confidence, social skills, and improvement in learning difficulties for children with special needs.
13	(Mikra et al., 2024)	Literature Review: Analysis of The Influence of Socialinteraction on Study of Students Special Needs In High Schools	Peer social interaction (supported by good social support) positively influences the learning motivation of students with special needs.
14	(Widhiati et al., 2022)	Social Support and Strategies for Dealing with Negative Stigma Against Children with Special Needs in Education	Support from family (emotional, material, informational) gives children with special needs the 'energy' and confidence to excel and try new things.
15	(Wahyuni & Mangunsong, 2022)	The Role of Social Skills Mediation in the Influence of Parental Involvement on the Academic Achievement of Children with Special Needs.	Parental involvement (external support) and social skills (ability to socialize) significantly affect the academic achievement of children with special needs (partial mediation effect of 7.36%).
16	(Sabila et al., 2021)	The Role of Social Support for Students with Disabilities in Achieving Non-Academic Achievement	Support from school and family is crucial (emotional, instrumental, appreciation, informational) for achievement.
17	(Sandra & Zuhroh, 2021)	Empathy and Social Acceptance of Regular Students Towards Students with Special Needs.	A highly significant positive correlation ($r=0.954$). The higher the empathy, the higher the social acceptance.

In the practice of inclusive education, empathy and acceptance of students with special needs are key to success in learning and social activities. The creation of an inclusive learning environment with non-discriminatory interactions encourages the growth of social awareness, such as tolerance and a willingness to help friends with special needs who are experiencing difficulties in their activities. An inclusive environment has a supportive impact on students with special needs, especially in terms of self-adjustment, feeling accepted, and becoming confident individuals.

Family Support

Several studies, such as research on the academic well-being of students with disabilities and social support for the achievement of children with special needs, have found that family is a crucial aspect in maintaining psychological well-being and shaping children's self-confidence. Parents need to play a role in supporting schools to provide optimal services for students. A healthy reciprocal relationship between schools and parents is very beneficial for the success of programs planned by schools. The role of the family in this case includes providing sufficient attention, moral support, and material needs for children with special needs in order to develop their well-being. Parental involvement in school activities includes parenting activities, report card collection, participation in community activities, or student creativity performances (Putranti et al., 2021). Many studies have proven that parental involvement in school programs can influence the academic achievement of children with special needs through the mediation of social skills.

Peer Support

Peer support plays a very important role in shaping the independence and self-efficacy of students with special needs. In previous studies on inclusive education in Islamic boarding schools, it was found that emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance from peers had a significant impact on students' independence and self-efficacy (Silain et al., 2024). However, indirect exclusion of students with special needs in their peer environment is still commonly found, especially among those who are slow learners. In addition, positive social interaction has been proven to increase the learning motivation and participation enthusiasm of students with special needs in school.

Support from Schools and Teachers

The support of schools and teachers cannot be ignored. Teachers play a key role as facilitators in creating a supportive and exciting learning environment. A supportive and exciting learning environment is expected to create a more positive view of the school environment among students. In general, a positive view of the school environment by students will create an atmosphere for the development of student potential (Saputra et al., 2020). To achieve this, teachers need to innovate and create interesting learning strategies, create adaptive teaching materials for all students, and be able to accommodate the formation of groups that effectively provide support and foster the emotional growth of students in the classroom. Training that supports teachers in creating innovative learning needs to be held and supported by the school management team (Hermina et al., 2025). Guidance and counseling services also need to play a role in developing students' self-confidence, social skills, and academic abilities.

The Influence of an Inclusive Environment

Previous studies have shown that an inclusive environment serves as a form of social support. Research on social physique anxiety in students with ADHD shows that students in inclusive schools experience lower levels of social anxiety than students in special needs schools or special schools. This research shows that social diversity in inclusive schools acts as a protector against social pressure and isolation. In practice, subject teachers can collaborate with school guidance counselors as professional partners in understanding students with special needs and developing inclusive learning (Maliha & Rahmi, 2025).

Inclusive education is essentially capable of developing the empathy and social sensitivity of students without special needs. Research on social sensitivity shows that female students have higher levels of empathy than male students. In another study, research on empathy and social acceptance of regular students towards students with special needs found a strong relationship between the two. The higher the empathy towards students with special needs, the higher their social acceptance.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that social support is the main foundation for the success of inclusive education in schools. Therefore, social support programs need to be designed in a structured and systematic manner through several steps. First, literacy education and training for students, teachers, principals, and parents to develop knowledge and increase empathy towards students with special needs. There is a need to develop a planned peer counseling or peer support system program. The hope is that every student will be able to provide healthy support for the social-emotional development of students with special needs. Integration of guidance and counseling services into inclusive school programs. This involvement can take the form of developing the self-reliance, coping skills, and independence of students with special needs. School policies need to evolve and move towards inclusivity in terms of curriculum, learning evaluation, and the positive culture developed by the school.

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