Which One is Happier? Psychological Well-Being Level of Students with Disabilities in Special or Inclusive Schools

Nisrina Nurika Agustin, Siti Ina Savira
Universitas Negeri Surabaya
E-mail: nisrina.17010664132@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Abstract: This research aims to prove the differences in psychological well-being (PWB) between students with disabilities in special and inclusive schools. This research is using the quantitative comparative method. The subjects are 69 students with disabilities from special schools and inclusive schools in Surabaya. This study focuses on students with disabilities such as deafness, hearing loss, physical disabilities, and other types of disabilities. The PWB level of each student is measured using Ryff’s multidimensional scales. The Mann-Whitney U analysis finds if the PWB level of students with disabilities in inclusive schools is higher than in special schools. The score of each dimension shows that purpose in life is the dimension with the highest average score in inclusive schools. Meanwhile, personal growth is the dimension with the highest average score in special schools. However, autonomy is the dimension with the lowest average score both in special schools and inclusive schools.

Keywords: psychological well-being; special school; inclusive school; students with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being, widely known as PWB, is essential for every person, including students with disabilities. Several factors can affect students’ PWB level, such as social support and social relationships (Hasanah, 2015), also inadequate coping mechanisms (Philip & Cherian, 2020). PWB is a dynamic psychological condition where an individual’s psychological well-being can change at any time. The changes happen in students’ home environments and interact with factors affecting their PWB level in school.

A special school is one type of educational institution that organizes learning for students with disabilities. The implementation of learning in a special school is carried out separately from regular schools. This separation aims to focus the teachers on handling students with disabilities, developing the students’ potentials, and embodying equality in education for every individual. However, despite the aim and benefit of implementing special schools, segregated or separated education creates a wide gap between students with disabilities and regular students. Moreover, it impedes the initiation stage between the students (Puspitasari, 2015).

The differences in the implementation and the education system also make the alumni of special schools not readily accepted by society. The low rate of reception can be caused by the lack of socialization about people with disabilities in the community because of the implementation of segregated education (Puspitarini, 2012). According to Baron & Byrne (2012), segregation between two different groups, in this case, is between students with disabilities and regular students, can affect their reception and perception between those two groups due to the in-group and the out-group conception from both of the groups. The emergence of discrimination and negative perception also become one of the causal factors of the poor interactions between those two groups. The group of people with disabilities is often considered the out-group of the society that makes them marginalized from the social dynamics of society. The low interaction rate of these two groups causes people to become not familiar with the life of people with disabilities. However, people with disabilities, indeed, can perceive that their existence is not an integral part of the society around them (Puspitasari, 2015).

The sentiment between in-group and out-group is related to research by Dammeyer, Chapman, & Marschark (2018) that students with hearing impairment showed higher PWB levels when they identify themselves to their regular peers. Meanwhile, students with hearing impairment who identify less than their regular peers tend to have lower PWB levels. Thus, it proves that the segregation between students with disabilities and regular students will impede the interactions and incline create a sense of being different that cause inadequate psychological well-being for them (Dammeyer, Chapman, & Marschark, 2018).

The reception of children with disabilities by society also affects their PWB. For example, research about the PWB level of students with disabilities at special schools indicates that the PWB level of senior high school students at those schools tends to be low. One of the causal factors is the lack of social support from the environment and negative stereotypes about the disabilities of students at those schools (Dewi, 2016).
The lack of reception by society and negative stereotypes towards the alumni of special schools often create a low participation rate of the alumni in universities (Rizky, 2014). Besides, the alumni of special schools are often judged incapable and cannot do the tasks as regular people do. These things later create discrimination in society, especially in working places. As they age, the self-regulation abilities of students with disabilities also increase. However, society often undervalues the abilities of people with disabilities, such as people with intellectual disabilities that are thought to remain unchanged throughout their lives. The inadecuacy regarding the self-regulation strategies for people with disabilities can be caused by low expectancies and the lack of intrinsic motivation, as they used to depend on people around them (Nader-Grosbois, 2014).

Besides special schools, inclusive schools also implement education for students with disabilities. Inclusive schools implement an integrated learning process for the students. The integration appears in physical integration, learning integration, and social integration (Rahmawati & Fatmawati, 2016). Social integration places students with disabilities and regular students in the same social groups and provides equal space and opportunity to interact. This integration can lead to the reception by the teachers, students, and parents related to multiculturalism and differences between students with disabilities and regular students (Puspitasari, 2015). Besides, inclusive schools are also aimed to give opportunities for students with disabilities to interact with their regular peers so that a sense of belongings can be created. These schools are expected to reduce the discrimination towards students with disabilities that can lessen their PWB.

Physical and learning integration allows students with disabilities to study together in the same classrooms and have equal learning outcomes with regular students even though the materials for students with disabilities at inclusive schools have been modified due to their needs (Rahmawati & Fatmawati, 2016).

However, discrimination towards students with disabilities by their peers still can be found in inclusive schools, such as bullying, exclusion, and humiliation (Mardatilah, 2018). Moreover, some teachers of inclusive schools still cannot identify and or assess the characteristics of students with disabilities, also being subjective and discriminative in giving opportunities to participate during learning activities in classrooms (Rudiyati, 2011). Discrimination for sure can affect the students’ PWB, especially on the positive relations with others dimension. For example, following a study by Pinquart & Pfieffer (2013), regular students tend to be reluctant to have good friendships or romantic relationships with visually impaired students.

Furthermore, the readiness and competence of the teachers to teach students with disabilities in inclusive schools certainly will affect the development of students’ PWB. According to Kantavong, Sujarwanto, Rerkjaree, & Budiyanto (2017), the teachers at inclusive schools tend to assume that teaching students with disabilities is an extra workload instead of their whole responsibility. The incapability of teachers in understanding the curriculum or the needs of students with disabilities will affect the learning process due to the lack of comprehension of the learning needs and the development of those students. According to Kantavong, Sujarwanto, Rerkjaree, & Budiyanto (2017), the teachers of inclusive schools still did not understand the differentiation curriculum, a designated curriculum for students with disabilities.

PWB is a concept of psychological well-being that focuses on self-development and recognizing every emotion felt by the individual in everyday life and negative mental state within (Liddle & Carter, 2015; Ryff C. D., 2014). PWB also concerns self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 2014). The well-being concept of PWB is different from the well-being concept of subjective well-being (SWB). The philosophical foundation of SWB is rooted in the hedonic perspective (Liddle & Carter, 2015). Hedonic perspective focus on how an individual feels life satisfaction, positive mood, and the absence of negative feeling (Liddle & Carter, 2015).

Many factors can affect an individual’s PWB level. According to Ryff and Keyes (1995), demographical factors such as age, sex, and culture could affect the PWB level. In addition, health conditions or special conditions such as disability can impact individuals’ PWB levels (Chapman & Dammeyer, 2017). Socioeconomic condition is also known as one of the factors that can affect the PWB level (Fassbender & Leyendecker, 2018).

PWB is an essential thing for students with disabilities. The PWB level of students can influence their academic performances at school. A study by Garcia et al. (2015) found a correlation between academic achievement and PWB. In correspondence with this finding, Firmanila & Sawitri (2015) found that the students’ academic efficacy of SMP Hang Tuah (Hang Tuah Junior High School) in Jakarta has a positive relationship with school well-being.

Therefore, based on the background of the study above, it is essential to realize the differentiation of students’ PWB level in those two types of schools with different systems above. Therefore, the result of this study hopefully can be used by policymakers as evaluation material in implementing special education for students with disabilities. Moreover, this study can be an introduction to understand students with disabilities’ well-being in special schools and inclusive schools that have not been researched much before.
METHOD

This research uses the quantitative comparative method to determine the psychological well-being level between students with disabilities in special schools and inclusive schools. Quantitative comparative research was a research that aimed to examine the relationship of one variable to other variables by testing whether the value of a dependent variable in a group was different from other values of dependent valuable in other groups (Jannah, 2018). Comparative research involved two or more groups and one independent variable (Duli, 2019). A more specific research process was displayed using Figure 1.

The overall number of participants was 69 students with disabilities which 22 students from inclusive schools and 47 students from special schools. The distribution of participants based on sex was 29 female students and 47 male students. There were 33 Junior High School (JHS/SMP) students and 36 Senior High School (SHS/SMA) students, based on the levels of education. Also, the age range of the participants was from 13-21 years old. The more detailed data of participants’ demographics were displayed in Table 1.

The variable in this research was psychological well-being (PWB) as the dependent variable. The PWB level was measured using Ryff’s Scale of Psychological Well-Being. This instrument consisted of 42 questions with six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The reliability testing of the instrument relied on the coefficient reliability score (Cronbach’s Alpha) 0.791. The reliability of each dimension was autonomy (0.546), environmental mastery (0.560), personal growth (0.213), positive relations with others (0.645), purpose in life (0.470), and self-acceptance (0.223).

The result of students’ psychological well-being level was analyzed using the Shapiro-Wilk normality test. Later, statistical hypothesis testing towards the analyzed data using the Mann-Whitney U test was applied to decide the presence or the absence of the differential level of psychological well-being (PWB) of students with disabilities in special schools and inclusive schools.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In general, the analysis of PWB descriptive data was displayed in Table 2. Then, the data were processed for statistical hypothesis testing. A nonparametric test was applied since the data were not distributed normally. Based on Mann-Whitney U test with sig. value (0.01) < p-value (0.05), therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. The null hypothesis in this research meant that there were no different PWB scores between the students.
The autonomy dimension is related to self-determination and self-independency. It comprises the strength to cope with social pressure, take action, think in a certain way; maintain their actions, and reflect and evaluate (Ryff, 2014). However, Andini (2020) finds that some obstacles impede the alumni of special schools related to their independence when coming to work. One of the obstacles is different communication patterns.

The alumni of special schools are familiar with using SIBI (Indonesian Language Sign System) or BISINDO (Indonesian Sign Language) at their schools. Therefore, the communication between people with hearing impairment and people who do not understand sign language is commonly done visually by writing on paper. However, sign language is grammatically different from the formal Indonesian language generally used by hearing people in Indonesia (Lillo-Martin & Gajewski, 2014). This condition later creates more difficulties in understanding the meaning of the sentences between hearing and hearing-impaired people.

The different condition happens to the students with hearing impairment who study at inclusive schools who are not familiar with sign language. Generally, there are no teachers who assist the students to use sign language nor teachers who teach sign language specifically at inclusive schools. Therefore, the communication is usually done visually by writings. This condition makes the alumni of inclusive schools with hearing impairment more familiar with the grammar of the Indonesian language, which is commonly used by hearing people. These different environments also influence the communication patterns with hearing people when they directly involve in society later.

Moreover, the autonomy dimension of students with visual impairment also indicates that they experience impediments to their independence. Mostly, the impediments can affect their developmental tasks, such as forming friendships or romantic relationships with other regular students (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2013). One of the factors is that students with visual impairment have difficulties associating emotional expression and action (Savira, Wagino, & Laksmiwati, 2013). In addition, the reluctance from regular students to form relationships with students with visual impairment can make it hard for the students with disabilities to form any relation with their peers (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2013). On another side, higher autonomy scores of students with disabilities in inclusive schools than students in special schools also can be influenced by the habituation to interact and the habitual patterns of regular students to students with disabilities. For example, according to research by Rahma et al. (2020), university students who graduated from inclusive schools are more independent in managing their

### Table 3. Result of Students’ T-Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Mann-Whitney U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive School</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>46.52</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>263.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special School</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>29.61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5. Differential PWB of each Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Inclusive School</th>
<th>Special School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental mastery</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relations</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose in life</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on this result, it could be concluded that there were differences in PWB level between students with disabilities in inclusive schools and special schools.

The construct of PWB had six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Based on the data analysis of each dimension, the result was displayed in Table 4.

### Discussion

The Mann-Whitney U test shows that the PWB level of students in inclusive schools is different from the PWB level of students at special schools. The mean rank of students with disabilities in inclusive schools is 46.52, and the mean rank of students in special schools is 29.61, which can be concluded that the students in inclusive schools have higher average PWB scores. This result complies with Theunissen et al. (2014), which finds that students with disabilities, especially with hearing impairment conditions at special schools, tend to have behavioral problems than students with the same condition at inclusive schools.

However, the result of this study needs to be interpreted carefully since there are tendencies from schools that recommend students with special needs who have severe conditions and need special treatments to attend special schools (Theunissen et al., 2014; Indriyany, 2015).

Furthermore, based on the average score from each PWB dimension in Table 3, it can be seen that purpose in life is the dimension with the highest average score in inclusive schools, and personal growth is the dimension with the highest average score in special schools. Meanwhile, autonomy is the dimension with the lowest average score both in special schools and inclusive schools.
needs in universities without assistant than university students who graduated from special schools who tend to be worried about the absence of assistants.

In inclusive schools, purpose in life is the dimension with the highest mean score. This dimension is related to possessing purpose in life and a sense of directedness in life; feeling the meaning of the present and the past life; holding beliefs that can give the purpose of life; having aims and objectives to live (Ryff, 2014). The result shows different levels of purpose in life between those two schools. However, it is still unclear about the factors that influence the differences. Nevertheless, every individual needs a sense of purpose to direct their life and behavior (Baumeister, 1991, 2013). The need for a sense of purpose also occurs in students with disabilities. A study by Komarudin (2019) finds that the students with disabilities at inclusive schools have ideas about their future goals. However, the students find difficulties in deciding the strategies or ways to achieve their future goals, especially regarding the limitations of their disability condition.

Vaccaro, Kimball, Moore, Newman, & Troiano (2018) research grounded theory research finds three stages in developing purpose in life for university students with disabilities. Those three stages are imagination, exploration, and integration. By involving participants from various kinds of disabilities such as specific learning disabilities, ASD, ADHD, hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disabled and traumatic brain injury, it is found that every participant has a willingness and, indeed, vision about what they want to achieve in the future. Vaccaro, Kimball, Moore, Newman, & Troiano (2018) find that the participants manifest purpose in life by imagining what they can do, their passion, and their strength or distinctive values. After imagining the process, the participants also make some efforts to achieve what they want, such as joining extracurricular activities and internship programs.

Positive relationships with others are marked by an individual’s ability to form close, satisfied, and trustful relationships with other people (Ivan, Vingerhoets, & Zeelenberg, 2010; Ryff, 2014). In this dimension, the average score of students in inclusive schools is higher than students in special schools. This result complies with a study by Adwiasa & Muryantinah (2013) that finds the self-adjustment score of students with hearing impairment at inclusive schools is higher than students with hearing impairment at special schools. Further research by Hasan & Handayani (2014) tries to associate social support and the self-adjustment of students with hearing impairment. It is found that there is a significant positive correlation between social support and self-adjustment during school, with a correlation coefficient score is 0.531. Furthermore, a study by Adwiasa & Muryantinah (2013) states that students with hearing impairment at inclusive schools will be more adaptable to interact with other regular students. It is different for students with hearing impairment at special schools who only interact with students with the same disability.

However, the findings by Adwiasa & Muryantinah (2013) and Hasan & Handayani (2014) are different with the finding by Qi et al. (2020) who finds that students with deafness at special schools have a good quality of lives. It is related to the schools’ positive handling and reception, such as the teachers and the peers who have the same conditions. Besides, by attending special schools, the students receive less negative attitudes from their peers (Oyewumi, Akangbe, & Adigun, 2013).

The impediment and negative attitudes that students with disabilities receive can be caused by different communication patterns, such as the students with hearing impairment (Hasan & Handayani, 2014). The students with visual impairment also experience impediments in their social interaction since they have difficulties representing 2 and 3 dimension shapes. It can affect their social interactions, such as imagining and associating emotional expressions with mental states and behaviors (Savira, Wagino, & Laksmiwati, 2019).

Environmental mastery is an individual’s ability to choose or create context around them using physical or mental behavior and the ability to manage a phenomenon (Ryff, 2014). Based on the result, the average PWB score of students with disabilities in inclusive schools is higher than students in special schools. It can happen by influencing several factors, such as temperament, brain development, or early stimulation (McClelland et al., 2018).

Additionally, according to Rozalski, Miller, & Stewart (2011), there is a tendency to place students with mild and moderate disability conditions at inclusive schools. Meanwhile, students with severe disability conditions are usually placed at special schools. This tendency can also be a factor in the gap of average PWB scores between students with disabilities at inclusive and special schools. Environmental mastery is a complex process that involves several factors, such as cognitive, metacognitive, behavioral, and emotional aspects (Panadero, 2017). This complex process will be done easier by students with mild to moderate disability conditions than students with severe disability conditions.

For example, children with visual impairment usually have difficulties in spatial abilities associating between emotional expression and behaviors or other difficulties related to the theory of mind (Savira, Wagino, & Laksmiwati, 2019). However, children with a visual impairment such as low vision and blindness have different spatial abilities (Caroli, Sagoneorcid, Falanga, & Orazio, 2020). Therefore, the gap in their abilities will be more contrasted than children with previous visual experiences and children without previous visual experiences.
On another side, students at inclusive schools tend to be children with mild until moderate disability conditions (Rozalski, Miller, & Stewart, 2011; Theunissen et al., 2014), so their abilities seem to be better than their peers with the same disability.

The personal growth dimension is related to the sense of continued development, seeing themselves as growing and expanding individuals; being open to new experiences; realizing their potentials and appreciating their progress over time (Ryff, 2014). This research shows that students with disabilities in inclusive schools have a higher average score on the personal growth dimension than students in special schools.

According to Eisenman, Pell, Poudel, & Pleet-Odle (2014), students with disabilities’ personal growth can be influenced by teachers as one of the factors. However, Ni’matuzahroh (2015) finds that 65% of teachers in Malang have not prepared to conduct inclusive education. Generally, this unpreparedness is related to the lack of information and knowledge about the needs of students with disabilities. Ni’matuzahroh (2015) also mentions if the teachers’ unpreparedness is generally about the lack of knowledge about differentiation curriculum and the assumption that teaching students with disabilities are just increasing their workload. With various types of students and a more significant number than students at special schools, the teachers are often overwhelmed when handling students with disabilities in the same classrooms with other regular students (Kantavong, Sujarwanto, Rerkjaree, & Budiyanto, 2017). The burden that is thought heavier than handling regular students by the teachers surely affects the PWB and the teachers’ motivation (Laksmi & Budiani, 2015).

Nevertheless, according to Eisenman, Pell, Poudel, & Pleet-Odle (2014), students with disabilities at inclusive schools are more familiar with stimuli that can increase their personal growth. At inclusive schools, students with disabilities have chances to interact with regular students. This interaction can be a positive input for students with disabilities to understand their social environment thoroughly. However, personal growth is also moderated by the support from their environments. Therefore, students with disabilities will have more positive development if they support teachers, peers, and parents (Eisenman, Pell, Poudel, & Pleet-Odle, 2014).

Positive attitudes towards the self mark the self-acceptance dimension; acknowledge and accepts multiple aspects of self, including the good and bad qualities; and feel optimistic about the past life (Ryff, 2014).

Based on the result of this study, the PWB of students with disabilities in inclusive schools is higher than students in special schools. Various factors can affect this result. One of them is the opportunity to interact with other regular students. Baron & Byrne (2012) mention that one of the ways to improve the reception between different groups is by increasing the interaction of people from those groups. It can erase the tendency of in-group and out-group sense between students with disabilities and society. This way also can initiate the understanding of needs, strengths, and weaknesses from students with disabilities and regular students.

Moreover, an early introduction and habituation of interaction between students with disabilities and regular students can help them be more prepared to interact with one another (Puspitasari, 2015). This result conforms with Dammeyer, Chapman, & Marschark (2018) research that students with disabilities who identify themselves with their regular peers tend to have higher PWB. Meanwhile, students with disabilities who identify themselves less with their regular peers tend to have lower PWB.

Overall, the PWB level of students with disabilities at inclusive schools is higher than students at special schools. Several factors can influence it. One of them is the opportunity of interaction between students with disabilities and social environments, whether the culture, customs, and norms (Baron & Byrne, 2012). This habituation can give stimuli for the students with disabilities to help them interact with broader society in the future as is stated by Rahma et al. (2020) that the university students who are graduated from inclusive schools are more independent in managing their needs than university students who are graduated from special schools who feel more worried without an assistant.

Furthermore, the different levels of PWB also are influenced by the levels of disabilities (Chapman & Dammeyer, 2017). According to Rozalski, Miller, & Stewart (2011) and Theunissen et al. (2014), it has been mentioned earlier that there is a tendency to place students with severe disabilities at special schools and students with mild-moderate disabilities at inclusive schools.

These disabilities influence students’ abilities, such as cognitive ability, which can help them interact with their peers or receive academic pressure. The spatial and creativity ability differences between children with vision impairment who have previous visual experiences and children with the same condition without previous visual experiences (Caroli, Sagoneorcid, Falanga, & Orazio, 2020).

After all, the differentiation in the placement of students with disabilities based on their levels of disability condition both at inclusive schools or special schools needs further evaluation. It is related to the readiness of the schools, such as the teachers and other supporting facilities that can facilitate an optimal learning process for students with severe disabilities. As is stated by Kantavong, Sujarwanto, Rerkjaree, & Budiyanto (2017), that the teachers at inclusive schools are not ready yet to implement inclusive education.
These conditions are mostly about understanding the needs of students with disabilities, the curriculum, and the supporting facilities, such as the availability of learning media designated for the special needs of the students.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research that has been done, it is found that the PWB level of students with disabilities in inclusive schools is higher than students in special schools. This result can be affected by several factors, such as the higher opportunity to interact with regular people for students with disabilities in inclusive schools, the levels of disability, readiness and the environment of the schools, also the habituation to the life of general society, which can be positive stimuli for students with disabilities. Moreover, based on the average scores of each PWB dimension, the purpose in life dimension is a dimension with the highest average score at inclusive schools. At the same time, personal growth is a dimension with the highest average score at special schools. On another side, autonomy is a dimension with the lowest average score at both of the schools.

REFERENCES


