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## Behaviors of Concern to Special Education Teachers in Their Classroom: Class Characteristics and Class Composition Predictors

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### ABSTRACTS

The purpose of this study was to find out the behaviors of students with special needs that were a concern for special school teachers in the classroom and how much help teachers needed to overcome these behavioral concerns. A total of twenty-nine special school teachers have participated by completing a questionnaire about the level of concern and support needed about students' behaviors in the classroom. Data were analyzed using SPSS. The results show that teachers are concerned most about distractibility and need much support in dealing with distractibility. Special school teachers could place students with the same kind of disabilities in the same class to minimize concerning behaviors and support needs. If teachers or students in special schools are limited, teachers can teach mixed-level classes. However, the classroom still consists of the same kind of disabled students.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of students with special needs behavior in the classroom is a fascinating topic to discuss. It is due to the limited information regarding student behavior problems in the class and how much help teachers need in dealing with these problems. Behavioral issues are related to the student's academic achievement and the teacher's performance. [Kremer et al. \(2016\)](#) found that behavioral problems break academic performance. Several topics about the level of concern and support needed are studied overseas. Some researchers surveyed 49 teachers in one elementary school using the Child Behavior Survey, found that the most concerning behaviors for the teachers were distractibility and disobedience. Another study conducted by [Beaudoin et al. \(2016\)](#) surveying primary school teachers in Croatia reported significantly higher levels of concern and a greater need for support for boys' behavior than girls across all dimensions of distractibility, disobedience, and aggression. The two previous studies, both were conducted on elementary school teachers. However, research focusing on the behavior of concern to special education teachers is not studied yet in Indonesia. Whereas, the teacher's ability to efficiently manage student behavior is a critical feature in the effective functioning of a classroom ([Beaudoin et al., 2018](#)).

In Indonesia, the number of special schools currently is still limited. The number of schools that accommodate students with special needs is 2,250 schools at various levels of education until the 2020/2021 academic year. Of course, that number is not comparable to the number of children with special needs in Indonesia, which reaches 1.6 million children. The impact of this limited access to schools is that students with special needs will study together in large classes with mixed disabilities and mixed grades. For that reason, this study aims to determine the level of behavior concern of students with special needs in class and the level of support needed by teachers to analyze class characteristics and composition class predictors. The results of this study will implicate teaching practice in classroom management.

## 2. METHODS

This research is descriptive statistical research. Data was collected using the level of concern on behavior problems and the support needed questionnaire adopted from [Stephenson et al. \(2000\)](#). Twenty-nine special education teachers spread across the province of East Java completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire measures teacher concern on students' behavior problems and the level of support needed. The participants rated students' behavior concern items on a 4-point scale (not at all, somewhat, quite, very), with 4 indicating high levels of concern. Then, the teachers rated the teachers' support needed items on a 4-point scale (not at all, a little, some, a lot), with 4 indicating a lot of support required. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS and presented in numbers and descriptive narratives. The questionnaire also contains information on participant demographics (see **Table 1**).

**Table 1.** Participant Demographics.

Participant Demographics	n (%)
<b>Class Size</b>	
≤ 10	26 (90)
> 10	3 (10)
<b>Class Characteristics</b>	
Single Disability in A Class	7 (24)
Mixed Disabilities in A Class	22 (76)
<b>Class Composition</b>	
Single-Level Class	7 (24)
Mixed-Level Classes	22 (76)

The majority of participants in this study teach in small classes, which are less than or equal to 10 students in one class. Three classes with more than ten students have 11 students each.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 2** illustrates the teacher's level of concern about students' behavior in class and the level of teachers' support needed. Twenty questions on the questionnaire are in **Table 2**. To facilitate the analysis of the items, grouping the questions into four subscales, namely distractibility, disobedience, aggression, and delinquency, was performed. Sequentially, the highest mean values were on the distractibility, aggression, disobedience, and delinquency subscales for the level of concern and support needed. The highest mean score of the items for the level of concern and support needed are both in the distractibility subscale. Those are "students excessive demands for teacher's attention/does not work independently" for the level of concern and "cannot complete the task according to the time" for the support needed.

**Table 2.** Teacher Mean Level of Concern and Support Needed for Students' Behaviors.

Behaviors	Level of Concern		Support Needed	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Distractibility</b>	<b>2.34</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>2.61</b>	<b>0.83</b>
Demands must be met immediately/cannot wait for attention	2.17	0.89	2.34	0.90
Disrupts the activities of others	2.00	0.93	2.17	0.89
Does not remain on-task for a reasonable time	2.59	0.82	2.86	0.70
Excessive demands for teacher's attention/ does not work independently	2.83	0.76	2.83	0.76
Distractibility or attention span a problem/ does not listen	2.41	0.78	2.83	0.93
<b>Disobedience</b>	<b>1.83</b>	<b>0.82</b>	<b>1.99</b>	<b>0.86</b>
Argues when reprimanded or corrected	1.62	0.86	1.76	0.91
Does not get along well with other children	1.62	0.73	1.93	0.88
Refuses to obey teacher-imposed rules	1.90	0.90	2.00	0.84
Does not follow established class rules	2.17	0.80	2.28	0.80
<b>Aggression</b>	<b>1.89</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>2.04</b>	<b>0.96</b>
Expresses anger inappropriately	2.14	0.83	2.24	0.87
Is physically aggressive with others/bullies	2.10	0.86	2.41	0.95
Damages others' property	1.65	0.77	1.79	0.94
Uses obscene language or gestures	1.69	1.00	1.79	0.94
Breaks things/damages others' property	1.86	1.06	1.96	1.12
<b>Delinquency</b>	<b>1.65</b>	<b>0.85</b>	<b>1.74</b>	<b>0.90</b>
Runs away from school or classroom	1.69	0.97	1.72	0.96
Steals	1.49	0.83	1.55	0.95
Lies	1.59	0.82	1.76	0.95
Engages in inappropriate sexual behavior	1.48	0.87	1.55	0.95
Is verbally aggressive with others	1.86	0.79	1.86	0.79
Ignores the feelings of others	1.86	0.83	1.97	0.78
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.93</b>	<b>0.85</b>	<b>2.10</b>	<b>0.89</b>

The lowest item mean value is in the delinquency subscale area, which is "engage in inappropriate sexual behavior" for the level of concern. Meanwhile, at the level of support needed, two items have the lowest mean value with the same score, namely "steals" and "engage in inappropriate sexual behavior."

**Table 3** found that all subscales' constructs were sufficiently reliable ( $p > 0.70$ ) so the reliability coefficients were acceptable. **Table 4** describes the data on the level of concern and

support needed for students with special education behaviors based on predictors of class characteristics and class composition.

**Table 3.** Reliability Coefficients for Four Subscales.

	Level of Concern	Level of Support Needed
	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha
Distractibility	0.78	0.73
Disobedience	0.82	0.85
Aggression	0.88	0.87
Delinquency	0.85	0.86

**Table 4.** Levels of Concern and Support Needed on the Behavior of Students with Special Needs in Class.

Predictors	Level of Concern					Support Needed		
	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
<b>Disability Composition in a Class</b>								
Single Disability	1.97 (0.78)	1.46 (0.58)	1.63 (0.65)	1.48 (0.59)	2.37 (0.91)	1.68 (0.72)	1.77 (0.77)	1.55 (0.67)
Mixed Disabilities	2.45 (0.84)	1.94 (0.89)	1.97 (0.96)	1.71 (0.92)	2.68 (0.86)	2.09 (0.89)	2.13 (1.03)	1.80 (0.95)
<b>Class Composition</b>								
Single-Level Class	2.49 (0.92)	2.07 (0.94)	2.09 (0.98)	1.71 (0.86)	2.63 (0.97)	2.14 (1.04)	2.23 (1.09)	1.83 (1.01)
Mixed-Level Classes	2.29 (0.83)	1.75 (0.81)	1.83 (0.88)	1.64 (0.86)	2.60 (0.85)	1.94 (0.81)	1.98 (0.95)	1.70 (0.86)

a. Note: A1 = Distractibility; A2 = Disobedience; A3 = Aggression; A4 = Delinquency; A5 = Distraction; A6 = Disobedience; A7 = Aggression; A8 = Delinquency.

Based on class characteristics, the level of teacher concern and support needed at each subscale consistently increases. The data exhibits that classes with mixed disabilities hold higher levels of teachers' concern about students' behavior and support needs. On the other hand, the teachers who teach in mixed-level classes perform a lower level of concern about students' behavior and lower support needs than those in single-level classes. If the data are analyzed based on class characteristics and class composition, the results explain that the distractibility subscale is the most concerning behavior and teachers need much support to deal with it. In contrast, teachers are not concerned most about delinquency in their class and need few supports to overcome delinquency.

Teaching students with special needs presents challenges for teachers compared to teaching regular students. The discussion of teachers' concerns for students' behavior and the support needs are in this section. The results showed that 90% of the class had a small size, less than ten students with special needs in a class. The remaining 10% (n = 3) have more than ten students in a class, eleven students to be exact. It exhibits those teachers provided an ideal class for students with special needs. Ideally, a class for students with special needs consists of three to ten students. [Fowler et al. \(2019\)](#) report that one of the main factors' teachers' successes in teaching students with special needs is class size because small classes provide sufficient time to meet and make plans with colleagues and family. Another reason small classes are ideal classes for children with special needs is that large class sizes tend to

lack attention (Linh *et al.*, 2021). Fewer students in class allow teachers to offer more individual lessons and target instruction to individual needs (Galton *et al.*, 2019).

Mixed-level classes occur when a teacher teaches more than one class group in the same classroom due to the insufficient number of teachers to organize the range of year groups into a single class. In Indonesia, mixed-level classes occur in special schools due to the limited of teachers or students. It impacts teachers teaching diverse students, such as disability and class composition, in one classroom. The results of this study indicate that teachers who teach in classes with two or more kinds of disabilities in one class have a higher level of concern and support needs than teachers who teach in classes with a single disability. Mahlo (2017) reports that the diversity of students in the classroom makes it difficult for teachers to achieve their tasks. The classes with various kinds of disabilities require teachers with some specific competencies. For example, the classroom consists of students with visual or hearing impairment, and autistic requires teachers to master Braille, sign language, and the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) all at once. If the class with various disabilities is not well managed, the students are out of control.

Furthermore, the implementation of mixed-level classes in learning still shows the pros and cons out there. In this study, teachers in the mixed-level class have a lower level of concern and support needs for each behavior subscale than those in the non-mixed class. Students show more positive attitudes and behaviors when studying in mixed groups than in a single class with very few numbers because teachers find it easier to design any cooperative learnings in the classroom (Shareefa, 2021). Furthermore, a positive impact on students' socio-emotional behavior in mixed-level classes was reported (Ronksley-Pavia *et al.*, 2019). Students in mixed-grade classes have the opportunity to talk, work, do activities, and play together with other friends from different level classes (Buaraphan *et al.*, 2018). In other words, older students can tutor and help younger students in some activities. Indeed, teaching mixed-level classes requires a lot of patience and perseverance, but the learning process becomes positive when there is efficient classroom management (Naparan & Alinsug, 2021). The mixed-level classes are an alternative approach for small schools (Buaraphan *et al.*, 2018), such as special education schools with limited students or teachers.

In this study, distractibility is the most concerning behavior for special education teachers in their class, and they require much support towards these. In contrast, delinquency behaviors do not concern the teacher that much. These results are similar to previous research conducted by some researchers. However, the criteria of participants are different, namely elementary teachers. Those findings indicate that teachers in special schools and regular schools need help managing disruptive student behavior in their classrooms. Students' disruptive behavior is significantly challenging in the teaching and learning process as it impacts students' academic achievement and teachers' mental health related to work (Närhi *et al.*, 2017).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, special education teachers are concerned most about distractibility and need much support in dealing with distractibility. Special education teachers who teach mixed-level or single kind of disability in the classroom do not have much concern about their student behavior and need less support. To reduce the level of concern and support needs, the classes in special schools need to avoid placing students in one classroom with various kinds of disabilities. An alternative to overcome the limitations of teachers or students or both in special schools is to teach mixed-level classes in one classroom but still in the same kind of disabilities.

## 5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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