




A Study of Teacher-Student Interaction in Building Social Cohesion with Autistic Children (Study at Benteng Jampea Presidential Instruction Elementary School No. 57 Selayar Islands)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the forms of teacher interactions with autistic students, their impact on social cohesion between regular and autistic students, as well as factors that support and hinder the formation of social cohesion in inclusive learning at SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study research type. Research informants consist of class teachers and regular students who are directly involved in the inclusive learning process. Data collection techniques are carried out through interviews, observation, and documentation, while data analysis uses the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that teacher interactions with autistic students take place through adaptive verbal communication, individual approaches, involvement in learning activities and group work, and providing emotional reinforcement during the learning process. These interactions have an impact on the development of social acceptance of regular students, involvement of autistic students in group work, the growth of peer empathy, and the role of teachers as social mediators in the classroom. Social cohesion is supported by the active role of teachers, the open attitude of regular students, group learning, social interaction habits, and inclusive communication, but is still influenced by the communication limitations of autistic students, teacher competence, inclusive facilities, and heterogeneous classroom conditions. Thus, teacher pedagogical interaction plays a crucial role in strengthening students' social cohesion in inclusive learning.

Keywords: Teacher Pedagogical Interaction, Social Cohesion, Inclusive Learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is currently a crucial global issue driven by education policies in various countries, including Indonesia, as a manifestation of efforts to uphold human rights in education. The primary focus of inclusive education is not only on access to education, but also on how social interactions between regular students and students with special needs can occur harmoniously. Social cohesion in inclusive classrooms is seen as a crucial indicator of the success of inclusive education, as it fosters solidarity, cooperation, and acceptance among individuals. However, research shows that in many countries, the success of inclusive education still faces obstacles in terms of suboptimal social interactions (Mustika, 2022). This situation emphasizes that inclusive education must be understood not only from a policy perspective but also from the dynamics of classroom interactions. Successful education is one that connects students from diverse backgrounds, including students with autism, within a

cohesive social ecosystem.

Furthermore, children on the autism spectrum face specific challenges that differ from regular students in communication, participation, and social engagement. Autistic children tend to experience difficulties in reading social codes, understanding emotions, and building friendships with their peers. If unaddressed, these obstacles can weaken the social cohesion that should be built through inclusive education. Recent research shows that autistic children are more vulnerable to isolation in regular school environments if there is no strong support from teachers and regular students (Husna, 2023). This demonstrates that achieving inclusive education is inseparable from strategies for building social cohesion, which are encouraged through teacher-student interactions. Therefore, classroom interactions are a central focus in creating an inclusive and harmonious learning environment. Although teachers strive to create a fair learning environment, gaps in interaction between teachers and autistic children in inclusive classes often persist. Teachers often focus more attention on regular students due to limited time and learning methods. This situation results in autistic children being less involved in discussions or social learning activities, leading them to feel they do not have an equal role with their peers. Recent research shows that differences in teacher treatment can impact the social isolation of autistic children in regular classrooms (Kurniawati, 2021). This interaction gap indicates a structural issue that must be addressed to support more meaningful social inclusion. Furthermore, a second problem is the minimal participation of autistic children in classroom social interactions. Autistic children often withdraw or have difficulty understanding the social codes used by their peers, so they rarely participate in classroom dynamics. This lack of participation can weaken the social cohesion that is expected to be formed through inclusive learning processes. Research in elementary schools shows that autistic children have lower levels of social participation than regular students, especially in group activities (Maulida, 2022). This indicates the need for systematic strategies to encourage the involvement of autistic children in various classroom social activities. Therefore, the active participation of autistic children is a major challenge that must be addressed in the context of inclusive education.

Another relevant phenomenon is the lack of teacher strategies for building social cohesion in inclusive classrooms, including at SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57 in the Selayar Islands. Teachers often use conventional approaches that emphasize cognitive aspects over social aspects, resulting in inadequate social interactions between autistic children and regular students. Yet, teachers play a crucial role as mediators, creating bridges of social interaction between heterogeneous students. Research shows that teachers who develop collaborative strategies can increase social acceptance of autistic children (Suryani, 2023). However, in reality, limited training and resources in schools in island areas make it difficult for teachers to implement innovative strategies.

In the context of the research location at SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands, autistic children have special needs that are not only academic, but also very dominant in the social and emotional aspects. Autistic children in an inclusive elementary school environment require clear, repetitive, and adaptive communication patterns to be able to understand teacher instructions and respond appropriately to social interactions. However, heterogeneous classroom conditions with a dominant number of regular students often prevent these needs from being optimally met. Teachers' limitations in implementing special communication strategies cause autistic children to tend to be passive and less involved in class social activities. This situation indicates that meeting the needs of autistic children in island schools still faces structural and pedagogical challenges.

In addition to communication needs, autistic children at the research site also require consistent social support from teachers and peers to build a sense of security and confidence in interactions. Autistic children tend to have difficulty understanding social norms, expressing emotions, and classroom dynamics, thus requiring ongoing support. At SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, regular students' limited understanding of the characteristics of autism has the potential to create social distance that hinders the formation of social cohesion. Without intensive teacher facilitation, autistic children are at risk of experiencing

social isolation even though they are administratively in an inclusive class. Therefore, the needs of autistic children at the research site require not only physical presence at school but also directed and meaningful social interactions as the foundation of inclusive education. The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze the forms of teacher and student interactions in building social cohesion with autistic children at SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) identify gaps in teacher interactions with autistic students, (2) describe the level of participation of autistic children in class social interactions, (3) explore teacher strategies in building social cohesion, and (4) examine the integration of regular student interactions with autistic children. With this aim, the study is expected to produce a comprehensive description of the dynamics of interactions in inclusive classes.

The benefits of this research are divided into practical and theoretical. Practically, the research results can be used as a reference for teachers and schools in developing social interaction strategies that support social cohesion in inclusive classrooms. This benefit is especially important in island regions such as Selayar, which face limited educational resources. Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature on inclusive education, particularly regarding teacher-student interactions in building social cohesion with autistic children. This research can also support national education policy in developing inclusion models that are more adaptive to the social needs of children with special needs

METHOD

Qualitative research focuses on a deeper understanding of social phenomena through the exploration of meanings, experiences, and interactions experienced by research subjects. Unlike quantitative research, which emphasizes numbers and statistics, qualitative research prioritizes narratives, interpretations, and contextual understanding of social reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the context of this research, qualitative research was chosen because the goal was not to measure numbers or the frequency of behavior, but rather to understand how interactions between teachers and regular students are formed with autistic children in inclusive classrooms. Through qualitative research, researchers can explore teachers' experiences, roles, strategies, and students' social responses in a richer and more detailed manner. This aligns with the characteristics of inclusive research, which requires a deep understanding of complex social dynamics (Moleong, 2021). In qualitative research using a case study approach, data analysis is conducted from the beginning of data collection until the research is completed. The technique used is interactive analysis by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, which consists of three main activity flows:

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Forms of interaction between teachers and students, especially autistic children, in learning activities at SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands.

Based on the results of research in the field, researchers found that the forms of teacher interaction that occurred were Adaptive Verbal Communication of Teachers, Individual Approaches in Learning, Involvement of Autistic Children in Class Activities and Emotional Reinforcement by Teachers.

a. Adaptive Verbal Communication of Teachers in Inclusive Learning

The research results show that adaptive verbal communication is one of the primary forms of interaction used by teachers to guide autistic students during classroom learning activities. Teachers consciously adjust their instructional delivery methods by using simple sentences, repeating directions, and using a direct communication approach to help autistic students understand the learning material. These communication adjustments are implemented as a strategy to maintain the engagement of autistic students in learning activities alongside regular students. Teachers also strive to maintain the attention of autistic students by providing instructions in stages according to their response capabilities. This

communication pattern is consistently used in various classroom learning activities.

Classroom observations also showed that teachers actively engaged with autistic students when providing instruction, particularly during reading and individual assignments. Teachers were seen repeating directions slowly while ensuring the autistic students were paying attention. Furthermore, teachers were seen using hand gestures to reinforce verbal instructions. On several occasions, autistic students were seen beginning to follow directions after the teacher repeated the instructions directly near their seats. This situation indicates that adaptive verbal communication is an effective interaction strategy in helping autistic students understand learning activities.

Based on the results of the interviews and observations, it can be concluded that adaptive verbal communication carried out by teachers is a form of pedagogical interaction that plays a crucial role in supporting the involvement of autistic students in learning activities. Language adjustments, repetition of instructions, and a direct communication approach help autistic students remain engaged in class activities. This communication strategy also demonstrates the teachers' special attention to the learning needs of autistic students without reducing the involvement of regular students in the learning process. Thus, adaptive verbal communication is one form of real interaction implemented by teachers in inclusive learning practices at SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands.

b. Teachers' Individual Approach to Autistic Students in the Learning Process

The research results show that an individualized approach is one form of interaction consistently employed by teachers in guiding autistic students during classroom learning activities. This approach is evident in teachers' habit of approaching autistic students directly when giving assignments, helping them understand instructions, and ensuring students remain engaged in learning activities with their peers. Teachers not only provide general instructions to all students but also set aside specific time to assist autistic students so they don't fall behind in learning activities. This form of individualized attention is seen as part of teachers' efforts to adapt learning strategies to the needs of autistic students. This approach also helps maintain autistic students' engagement in the collective learning situations that occur in the classroom.

Classroom observations also showed that the teacher approached the autistic students several times during learning activities, particularly while students were working on individual assignments and copying material from the board. The teacher was seen giving directions slowly while standing near the autistic students, ensuring that the students were paying attention. On several occasions, the teacher appeared to wait for the students' responses before returning to teaching other students. This approach demonstrated the direct individual attention given to the autistic students to ensure their continued participation in the learning activities. The teacher's presence near the autistic students also appeared to help the students begin tasks more quickly than before receiving personal directions.

Based on the interview and observation results, it can be concluded that the individualized approach employed by teachers is an important form of pedagogical interaction in supporting the engagement of autistic students in classroom learning activities. This approach not only helps students understand learning instructions but also provides a sense of security for autistic students in participating in learning activities with their peers. The teacher's direct presence near the autistic students is part of an interaction strategy that helps maintain student concentration and participation throughout the learning process. Thus, the individualized approach employed by teachers is a form of concrete interaction that strengthens inclusive learning practices in the classroom.

c. Involvement of Autistic Students in Learning Activities and Group Activities

The research results show that involving autistic students in learning activities is one form of interaction that teachers actually carry out to maintain their participation in class activities. Teachers do not allow autistic students to remain passive during learning, but strive

to provide assignments tailored to their abilities so they can continue to participate in the learning process alongside regular students. This involvement is evident in activities such as copying materials, answering simple questions, and participating in guided group activities. These efforts are made so that autistic students still feel part of the class activities and are not separated from the dynamics of the ongoing learning. The involvement of autistic students in learning activities also demonstrates teachers' attention to the importance of social interaction in inclusive learning.

Classroom observations revealed that the teacher several times assigned autistic students to copy material from the board and participate in group activities with other students. During group activities, the teacher was seen directing regular students to involve the autistic students in simple discussions and group assignments. Furthermore, the autistic students appeared to participate in writing activities, although they still needed additional guidance from the teacher. The presence of autistic students in study groups demonstrates that the teacher strives to maintain student engagement in learning activities with their peers. This situation demonstrates that the involvement of autistic students in classroom activities is planned and not spontaneous.

Based on the results of the interviews and observations, it can be concluded that the involvement of autistic students in learning activities and group activities is a form of pedagogical interaction carried out by teachers to maintain the participation of autistic students in class dynamics. Adjusting tasks and incorporating autistic students into study groups helps students remain engaged in the learning process with regular students. This strategy also shows the teacher's efforts to prevent learning isolation in autistic students during learning activities. Thus, the involvement of autistic students in class activities is a form of real interaction that strengthens inclusive learning practices at SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands.

d. Teachers' Emotional Empowerment of Autistic Students in Learning Activities

The results of the study indicate that emotional reinforcement provided by teachers to autistic students is a form of interaction that plays a crucial role in supporting their engagement during classroom learning activities. Teachers not only focus on delivering the subject matter but also strive to build a sense of comfort and self-confidence in autistic students through motivation, simple praise, and persuasive approaches. This form of emotional reinforcement is evident when teachers respond positively to autistic students' efforts in completing assignments, even if the results are not optimal. Teachers also strive to maintain a calm communication atmosphere so that autistic students do not feel pressured to participate in learning activities with other students. This approach demonstrates teachers' attention to the emotional aspects of autistic students as part of an inclusive learning interaction strategy.

Classroom observations revealed that teachers frequently provided positive verbal responses to autistic students when they began following learning directions. They provided simple encouragement, such as asking students to continue their work slowly, and reassured students when they appeared less focused on the learning activity. In certain situations, teachers were seen waiting for autistic students to respond before continuing their explanations to other students, demonstrating their concern for their readiness to learn. The teachers' approaches appeared to help autistic students re-engage in learning activities after previously exhibiting passive behavior. This situation demonstrates that emotional reinforcement is part of an interaction strategy that supports autistic students' engagement in classroom activities.

Based on the results of the interviews and observations, it can be concluded that emotional reinforcement provided by teachers is a form of pedagogical interaction that plays a crucial role in maintaining the participation of autistic students during the learning process. Providing motivation, simple praise, and a calming communication approach helps autistic students feel more confident in participating in learning activities alongside regular students. This emotional support also demonstrates teachers' attention to the psychological needs of

autistic students as part of inclusive learning practices in the classroom. Thus, emotional reinforcement by teachers is a form of concrete interaction that strengthens the involvement of autistic students in learning activities at SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands.

The impact of teacher interaction in facilitating social cohesion between regular students and autistic children in the school.

The results of the study indicate that the interactions built by teachers in the learning process in inclusive classes have a real impact on the formation of social cohesion between regular students and autistic students at SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands. This impact is not only seen in the increased involvement of autistic students in learning activities, but also in changes in the social attitudes of regular students who are increasingly open in interacting with friends with special needs. The role of teachers in directing communication, getting used to group work, and providing an understanding of the importance of helping each other are important factors in forming more harmonious social relationships in the classroom environment. Consistent interactions during learning activities also encourage the creation of a more inclusive and participatory learning atmosphere for all students. Based on the results of interviews and observations conducted, the impact of teacher interactions on student social cohesion in the inclusive class can be seen through four main aspects, namely social acceptance by regular students, involvement of autistic students in group work, the growth of empathy towards peers, and the role of teachers as social mediators in building interactions between students.

Factors that impact the development of social cohesion through interactions between teachers and students with autistic children at SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands.

The results of the study indicate that the formation of social cohesion between regular students and autistic students in the inclusive class of SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands is not only influenced by the teacher's pedagogical interaction during learning activities, but is also determined by various factors that support and hinder the process of social interaction between students. Supporting factors are seen through the active role of teachers in directing class interactions, the open attitude of regular students in accepting the presence of autistic students, the implementation of group learning that encourages cooperation, and the use of inclusive communication that helps autistic students remain involved in joint learning activities. On the other hand, there are still several inhibiting factors that affect the optimization of social cohesion, such as limited communication among autistic students, a lack of understanding of some regular students regarding the characteristics of friends with special needs, limited teacher competence in inclusive learning, minimal supporting facilities, and heterogeneous class conditions. Based on the results of interviews and observations conducted in the field, these factors indicate that social cohesion in inclusive classes is formed through a dynamic process and is influenced by pedagogical and social conditions that develop during learning activities.

DISCUSSION

Forms of interaction between teachers and students, especially autistic children, in learning activities at SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands.

a. Adaptive Verbal Communication of Teachers as a Form of Pedagogical Interaction in Inclusive Learning

Research findings indicate that adaptive verbal communication is the primary strategy used by teachers to build learning interactions with autistic students in inclusive classrooms. The use of simple language, repetition of instructions, and gradual delivery of directions demonstrate the adjustment of teachers' pedagogical approaches to the communication needs of autistic students. These adjustments demonstrate that inclusive learning

interactions cannot be achieved through uniform communication patterns as with regular students, but require differentiated communication strategies that consider the social and cognitive developmental characteristics of autistic students. From an inclusive education perspective, adaptive communication is a form of pedagogical response to individual students' needs so they can continue to participate in collaborative learning activities (Yuwono, 2021). Thus, adaptive verbal communication is a crucial instrument in maintaining the continuity of inclusive learning interactions in the classroom.

Theoretically, these findings align with the symbolic interactionist perspective, which positions communication as the primary medium for constructing social meaning in interpersonal relationships (Blumer, 1969). In the context of inclusive learning, adaptive communication enables autistic students to understand the social symbols used in classroom activities through a gradual, teacher-facilitated interpretation process. The teacher acts as a mediator, bridging the communication limitations of autistic students with the dynamics of social interaction in the classroom, so that communication functions not only as a means of conveying material but also as a means of social integration of students within the learning community (Suryani, 2023). Therefore, adaptive verbal communication is an essential part of pedagogical interaction practices in inclusive learning.

The findings of this study also support previous research showing that the use of simple instructions and systematic repetition of directions can increase the engagement of autistic students in inclusive classroom learning activities (Kurniawati, 2021). Communication tailored to the comprehension abilities of autistic students helps them respond to instructions more effectively compared to general communication given to regular students. Furthermore, adaptive communication also plays a role in reducing the tendency for autistic students to be passive during learning activities because they have the opportunity to understand the task structure more clearly (Maulida, 2022). Thus, adaptive verbal communication not only impacts academic aspects but also strengthens the social engagement of autistic students in classroom activities.

In the context of SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands, teachers' adaptive verbal communication has strategic significance because limited inclusive learning facilities require teachers to play a more active role in adapting learning interaction strategies. Teachers function not only as conveyors of material but also as communication liaisons between autistic students and the broader classroom social environment. This direct and repetitive communication approach helps autistic students understand ongoing learning activities and increases their readiness to engage in activities with regular students. Research shows that in the context of schools with limited inclusive resources, the role of teacher communication is a key factor in maintaining the social participation of students with special needs in the classroom (Fitriana, 2024). Therefore, adaptive verbal communication is an effective interaction strategy in supporting inclusive learning practices at the research site.

Based on this description, it can be understood that adaptive verbal communication is a form of pedagogical interaction that plays a strategic role in supporting the involvement of autistic students in inclusive learning. Adjustments to language, repetition of instructions, and communication approaches taken by teachers demonstrate a systematic effort to build interactive relationships that are responsive to the needs of autistic students. Adaptive communication not only helps autistic students understand learning activities but also serves as a means of strengthening their position as part of the classroom learning community. Thus, adaptive verbal communication is an important indicator of the success of teacher interactions in building inclusive, participatory learning that is oriented towards student social cohesion (Hidayat, 2025).

b. Teachers' Individual Approach to Autistic Students as a Pedagogical Interaction Strategy in Inclusive Learning

Research findings indicate that teachers' individualized approaches to autistic students constitute a form of pedagogical interaction that plays a crucial role in maintaining student engagement in inclusive classroom learning activities. This approach is evident in teachers'

habits of approaching students directly, providing personal re-explanations, and ensuring students understand instructions before continuing with other students. This practice demonstrates that inclusive learning cannot be implemented solely through a classical approach but requires a differentiated strategy that considers individual student needs. In the context of inclusive education, an individualized approach is a form of learning adaptation that allows autistic students to continue participating in classroom activities without experiencing learning isolation (Yuwono, 2021). Thus, a teacher's individualized approach is not simply a form of additional attention, but rather a pedagogical strategy that serves to maintain the continuity of learning interactions with autistic students in a regular classroom environment.

Theoretically, a teacher's individual approach can be understood through a differentiated learning perspective, which emphasizes the importance of adapting learning strategies based on students' learning readiness, communication needs, and developmental characteristics. This approach enables teachers to create a learning environment that is responsive to differences in student abilities, so that each student receives equal learning opportunities in heterogeneous classroom situations (Tomlinson, 2017 in Santoso, 2022). In the context of autistic students, an individual approach functions not only as an academic strategy but also as a means of building more stable social relationships between teachers and students. These relationships play a crucial role in increasing autistic students' sense of learning security, thus enabling them to better prepare for learning activities with their peers (Pratiwi, 2023). Therefore, a teacher's individual approach is part of the pedagogical interaction practice that supports the creation of adaptive, inclusive learning.

The findings of this study also align with recent research showing that individualized teacher support significantly increases the learning engagement of autistic students in inclusive elementary school classrooms. Direct support helps students understand learning instructions in a more structured manner, preventing confusion in participating in class activities (Fitriana, 2024). Furthermore, other research shows that individualized teacher approaches can reduce the tendency for passive behavior in autistic students because they receive learning support tailored to their communication and information-processing needs (Rahmawati, 2022). Thus, individualized teacher support serves not only as a teaching strategy but also as a social adaptation mechanism that helps autistic students maintain engagement in classroom dynamics.

In the context of SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands, the individual teacher approach has strategic significance because the limited inclusive learning facilities require teachers to play a more active role as mediators of learning interactions for autistic students. Teachers not only function as transmitters of learning materials, but also as companions who help students adjust to collective learning situations in the classroom. A direct individual approach allows autistic students to gradually understand learning instructions and increases their readiness to participate in learning activities with regular students. Recent research shows that in the context of schools with limited inclusive resources, the individual teacher approach is a crucial factor in maintaining the sustainability of social participation of students with special needs in the classroom (Hidayat, 2025). Therefore, the individual teacher approach functions not only as a learning strategy but also as a form of social intervention that supports the integration of autistic students into the learning community.

Based on this description, it can be understood that the individual teacher approach is a form of pedagogical interaction that plays a strategic role in supporting the engagement of autistic students in inclusive learning. This approach allows teachers to tailor learning instructions to students' needs so that they can continue to participate in learning activities with their peers without experiencing gaps in participation. Furthermore, the individual approach also strengthens the interactive relationship between teachers and autistic students, which forms the basis for developing a sense of security in learning in an inclusive classroom environment. Thus, the individual teacher approach is a key indicator of the success of inclusive learning interactions that are oriented towards the ongoing social

c. Involving Autistic Students in Learning Activities as an Inclusive Interaction Strategy in the Classroom

Research findings indicate that the involvement of autistic students in learning and group activities is a form of pedagogical interaction that plays a crucial role in maintaining the continued participation of autistic students in inclusive classroom dynamics. This involvement is evident through the provision of assignments tailored to the students' abilities and the guided integration of autistic students into learning groups with regular students. This situation indicates that the involvement of autistic students in classroom activities does not occur spontaneously, but rather through pedagogical intervention strategies designed by teachers to ensure students remain part of the collective learning process. From an inclusive education perspective, the active involvement of students with special needs is an important indicator of successful learning oriented towards equal learning opportunities for all students (UNESCO, 2020). Thus, the involvement of autistic students in learning activities is a form of concrete interaction that demonstrates the existence of inclusive learning practices in the classroom.

Theoretically, the involvement of autistic students in group activities can be understood through a social constructivist approach, which emphasizes that the learning process occurs optimally through social interactions between students. In the context of an inclusive classroom, group activities function not only as an academic learning strategy but also as a social space that allows autistic students to gradually develop communication and interaction skills (Vygotsky in Lestari, 2022). The involvement of autistic students in group activities provides them with the opportunity to understand the structure of social cooperation through direct experience with peers. Therefore, involvement in group activities is an important part of the social integration process of autistic students in the learning community of an inclusive classroom.

The findings of this study also align with recent research showing that the involvement of autistic students in collaborative learning activities significantly increases their social participation and self-confidence in inclusive elementary school classroom environments. Structured group activities help autistic students understand the social roles they must play in collaborative activities, preventing them from being passive observers in the learning process (Pratiwi, 2023). Furthermore, other research shows that the active involvement of autistic students in group assignments can strengthen social interactions with peers and reduce the tendency for learning isolation in inclusive classrooms (Fitriana, 2024). Therefore, the involvement of autistic students in group learning activities plays a significant role in building more inclusive social interactions.

In the context of SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands, the involvement of autistic students in learning activities has strategic significance because the school's location in an island region with limited inclusive learning facilities requires teachers to optimize social interaction as the primary means of integrating autistic students in learning activities. Teachers play an active role in guiding regular students to involve autistic students in group activities, thus creating a more participatory learning situation. This approach shows that social interaction in the classroom does not only occur naturally, but is also shaped through pedagogical interventions carried out by teachers consciously. Research shows that the involvement of students with special needs in collective learning activities is an important factor in maintaining the sustainability of inclusive learning in schools with limited supporting facilities (Hidayat, 2025). Therefore, the involvement of autistic students in learning activities is part of an interaction strategy that strengthens inclusive education practices at the research site.

Based on this description, it can be understood that the involvement of autistic students in learning activities and group activities is a form of pedagogical interaction that plays a crucial role in supporting the success of inclusive learning in the classroom. This involvement not only provides opportunities for autistic students to participate in learning activities

alongside regular students but also helps them develop social interaction skills through collective learning experiences. Furthermore, active involvement in group activities strengthens the position of autistic students as part of the classroom learning community, thereby reducing the potential for social isolation during the learning process. Thus, the involvement of autistic students in learning activities is an important indicator of the success of teacher interactions in building inclusive, participatory learning that is oriented towards student social cohesion (Suryani, 2023).

d. Teachers' Emotional Empowerment of Autistic Students as a Pedagogical Interaction Strategy in Inclusive Learning

Research findings indicate that emotional reinforcement provided by teachers to autistic students is a crucial part of pedagogical interaction strategies in inclusive classroom learning. This reinforcement is evident through simple motivational support, praise for students' learning efforts, and a reassuring communication approach when students experience difficulties participating in learning activities. This practice demonstrates that the success of inclusive learning is determined not only by the strategy for delivering material but also by the teacher's ability to foster a psychological environment that supports the engagement of autistic students in learning activities. In the context of inclusive education, teacher emotional support serves as a social adaptation mechanism that helps students with special needs maintain learning participation in the regular classroom environment (Yuwono, 2021). Thus, emotional reinforcement is an integral part of learning interactions oriented towards the needs of autistic students.

Theoretically, teacher emotional empowerment can be understood through a pedagogical relationship perspective, which positions teacher-student interactions as the foundation for a sense of learning safety in an inclusive classroom environment. A supportive pedagogical relationship enables autistic students to develop self-confidence and readiness to interact in learning activities with peers (Pianta in Sari, 2022). In this context, emotional support functions not only as a form of individual attention but also as a social interaction strategy that helps autistic students adjust to heterogeneous classroom dynamics. Therefore, teacher emotional empowerment is a crucial part of building stable social interactions for autistic students throughout the learning process.

The findings of this study also align with recent research showing that teacher emotional support significantly influences the social engagement of students with special needs in inclusive elementary school classrooms. Consistently providing positive reinforcement helps autistic students reduce their tendency to withdraw and increases their courage to participate in learning activities alongside regular students (Fitriana, 2024). Furthermore, other research shows that positive emotional relationships between teachers and autistic students play a role in increasing the stability of attention and students' readiness to follow learning instructions continuously (Rahmawati, 2023). Thus, teacher emotional support not only impacts the psychological aspects of autistic students but also strengthens their engagement in classroom learning dynamics.

In the context of SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands, emotional reinforcement provided by teachers has strategic significance because the limited inclusive learning facilities make the role of teachers as the primary source of support for autistic students in participating in learning activities. Teachers not only function as conveyors of material, but also as figures who help autistic students adjust to learning situations that require continuous social interaction. The teacher's calming communication approach and simple motivational provision help autistic students maintain engagement in learning activities despite facing limitations in social communication. Research shows that in the context of schools with limited inclusive facilities, teacher emotional support is a crucial factor in maintaining the continued participation of students with special needs in the regular classroom environment (Hidayat, 2025). Therefore, teacher emotional reinforcement is part of the pedagogical interaction strategy that strengthens inclusive learning practices at the research site.

Based on this description, it can be understood that teacher emotional reinforcement is a form of pedagogical interaction that plays a strategic role in supporting the engagement of autistic students in inclusive learning. Consistent emotional support helps autistic students feel more comfortable, confident, and ready to participate in learning activities alongside regular students. Furthermore, a positive emotional relationship between teachers and autistic students strengthens the stability of social interactions, which form the basis for learning participation in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, teacher emotional reinforcement is a crucial indicator of the success of inclusive learning interactions that focus on the ongoing social engagement of autistic students (Suryani, 2023).

The impact of teacher interaction in facilitating social cohesion between regular students and autistic children in schools.

a. Social Acceptance by Regular Students towards Autistic Students as an Impact of Teacher Interaction in Inclusive Learning

The social acceptance of autistic students by regular students in this study indicates that teachers' pedagogical interactions play a strategic role in shaping more inclusive social relationships in the classroom. This acceptance is reflected not only in the willingness of regular students to learn together but also in changes in social attitudes toward autistic students in daily learning activities. This suggests that social cohesion in inclusive classrooms does not develop naturally but rather develops through a process of social familiarization facilitated by teachers. Consistently directed interactions enable regular students to understand diversity as part of the classroom dynamic, rather than as differences to be avoided. Thus, the social acceptance of regular students is an early indicator of the formation of an inclusive social relationship structure in learning.

Theoretically, social acceptance among students in inclusive classrooms can be explained through the concept of social cohesion, which emphasizes the importance of attachment, belonging, and mutual trust within a learning group. Social cohesion is formed when individuals within a group are able to develop positive interpersonal relationships through repeated and meaningful interactions (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2021). In the context of inclusive education, social acceptance of students with special needs is part of the social integration process that enables them to participate equally in a shared learning environment (UNESCO, 2020). Therefore, the openness of regular students to the presence of autistic students indicates that teacher interactions have functioned as a social mechanism that strengthens the structure of group cohesion in the classroom.

The findings of this study also align with recent research showing that peer acceptance of students with special needs develops through teacher pedagogical interventions that emphasize cooperation, open communication, and fostering social interaction in inclusive classrooms. Classroom environments actively facilitated by teachers to support positive interactions have been shown to increase the social engagement of students with special needs and reduce the tendency for social isolation in learning (Koster et al., 2022; Schwab, 2021). Furthermore, other research indicates that peer acceptance is a crucial factor in increasing autistic students' sense of learning security, enabling them to better participate in academic and social activities in regular classrooms (De Boer & Pijl, 2020). Therefore, regular students' social acceptance of autistic students is an important indicator of the success of inclusive learning practices based on social interaction.

In the context of SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands, the social acceptance of autistic students by regular students has a broader meaning because it occurs in a school environment with limited formal inclusive education facilities. This condition indicates that teacher interaction plays a major role in building a social relationship structure that supports the involvement of autistic students in classroom activities. Consistent teacher guidance helps regular students understand the importance of working together without discriminating against friends, thus creating a more participatory and open learning atmosphere. This situation shows that social cohesion in the classroom is influenced not only

by inclusive school policies, but also by the teachers' pedagogical interaction practices in daily learning. Thus, the social acceptance of regular students in the research class is evidence that teacher interaction functions as a primary driver of the social integration of autistic students in the learning community.

Based on this description, it can be understood that regular students' social acceptance of autistic students is a direct result of teachers' pedagogical interactions oriented toward establishing inclusive social relationships in the classroom. This acceptance not only strengthens the autistic students' position as part of the learning group but also creates a social environment that supports the development of sustainable academic and social participation. Targeted teacher interactions enable regular students to develop an open attitude toward diversity as part of a shared learning experience. Thus, regular students' social acceptance becomes an important foundation for establishing sustainable inclusive classroom social cohesion.

b. The Involvement of Autistic Children in Group Work as an Indicator of Strengthening Social Cohesion in Inclusive Learning

The involvement of autistic students in group work activities, as found in this study, indicates the development of more open social relationships between regular students and autistic students in an inclusive classroom environment. This involvement not only reflects academic participation but also indicates a change in the structure of social interactions that allows autistic students to become active participants in the dynamics of learning groups. In the context of inclusive learning, group work functions as a social space that allows students with special needs to build experiences of interacting directly with their peers through collaborative activities. The presence of autistic students in learning groups indicates that teacher-facilitated interactions have resulted in more participatory social relationships in the classroom. Thus, involvement in group work is a concrete indicator of the formation of social cohesion among students in the learning environment.

Theoretically, the involvement of autistic students in group work can be explained through a cooperative learning perspective, which places interaction between students as a key element in building meaningful social learning experiences. Cooperative learning allows students with different characteristics to contribute to group activities through role allocation tailored to their individual abilities (Slavin, 2014 in Rahman, 2022). In the context of inclusive education, this involvement is an important means for autistic students to develop social communication skills through ongoing peer learning experiences (Avramidis & Norwich, 2022). Therefore, group work functions not only as an academic learning strategy but also as a social mechanism that strengthens the integration of autistic students into the classroom community.

The findings of this study also align with recent research showing that the involvement of autistic students in collaborative activities significantly contributes to increasing their social participation in inclusive elementary school classrooms. Group activities provide opportunities for autistic students to interact naturally with peers, thereby reducing the tendency for social isolation during the learning process (Garrote et al., 2021). Furthermore, other research shows that teacher-facilitated group work can increase the social acceptance of students with special needs because the interactions are repetitive and contextualized within daily learning activities (Carter et al., 2020). Therefore, the involvement of autistic students in group work is one indicator of the success of inclusive learning practices based on social interaction.

Based on this description, it can be understood that the involvement of autistic students in group work is one of the important impacts of teacher interaction in building social cohesion in inclusive classrooms. The participation of autistic students in group activities not only strengthens their engagement in learning but also expands opportunities to build more stable social relationships with peers. Collaborative interactions help autistic students gain social experiences that support the development of self-confidence in the classroom environment. Thus, the involvement of autistic students in group work is an important

indicator of the success of teacher pedagogical interactions in creating inclusive learning that is participatory and oriented towards student social cohesion.

c. The Growth of Peer Empathy Towards Autistic Students as an Impact of Teacher Interaction in Inclusive Learning

The growth of empathy among regular students toward autistic students, as found in this study, indicates that teacher pedagogical interactions play a crucial role in fostering students' social sensitivity in an inclusive classroom environment. This empathy is reflected in the willingness of regular students to assist friends experiencing learning difficulties, to wait for autistic students' responses in group activities, and to provide opportunities for them to remain involved in class activities. These changes in attitudes demonstrate that social interaction in learning not only serves as a means to achieve academic goals but also as a process of developing students' social character through shared learning experiences. In the context of inclusive learning, peer empathy is an indicator of the development of healthy social relationships between regular students and students with special needs. Thus, the growth of empathy among regular students indicates the strengthening of social cohesion formed through ongoing teacher-facilitated interactions in the classroom.

Theoretically, peer empathy is a crucial element in building social cohesion within a learning group because it enables individuals to understand the conditions of others and adapt their social behavior in daily interactions. Social cohesion in inclusive classrooms develops through repeated interaction experiences, enabling students to develop attitudes of mutual respect and support among group members (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2021). In the context of inclusive education, empathy does not emerge spontaneously but is formed through social habits facilitated by teachers through collaborative activities and open communication in the classroom (UNESCO, 2020). Therefore, the growth of peer empathy toward autistic students indicates that teacher interactions serve as a mechanism for building more inclusive social relationships within the learning environment.

The findings of this study also align with recent research showing that peer empathy toward students with special needs develops through direct engagement in collaborative learning activities consistently facilitated by teachers. Classroom environments that provide opportunities for ongoing social interaction have been shown to enhance regular students' understanding of the diverse needs of their peers, thus encouraging voluntary helping behavior (Garrote et al., 2021). Furthermore, other research shows that peer empathy significantly contributes to increased social participation in autistic students because they feel more accepted in a supportive learning environment (Schwab, 2021). Thus, peer empathy is a crucial factor in strengthening stable social relationships in inclusive classrooms.

Based on this description, it can be understood that peer empathy toward autistic students is one of the important impacts of teacher interactions in building social cohesion in inclusive classrooms. Empathy developed through shared learning experiences helps autistic students gain more stable social support in participating in learning activities. Furthermore, peer empathy also strengthens interpersonal relationships between students, creating a more inclusive and participatory classroom environment. Thus, the growth of peer empathy is an important indicator of the success of teacher pedagogical interactions in building sustainable student social cohesion in inclusive learning.

d. The Role of Teachers as Social Mediators in Facilitating Social Cohesion between Regular Students and Autistic Students in Inclusive Classrooms

The role of teachers as social mediators found in this study indicates that pedagogical interactions serve not only as a means of delivering learning materials but also as a mechanism for managing the dynamics of social relationships among students in inclusive classrooms. Teachers play an active role in directing communication, fostering group collaboration, and instilling in regular students the importance of involving autistic students in collaborative learning activities. This role demonstrates that social cohesion in inclusive classrooms is not formed automatically through the presence of students in the same learning space, but rather through a conscious and ongoing process of social facilitation carried out by

teachers. Teacher-mediated interactions enable regular students to understand diversity as part of the collective learning experience in the classroom. Thus, the role of teachers as social mediators is a crucial element in building inclusive social relationships in the learning environment.

Theoretically, the teacher's role as a social mediator can be understood through the perspective of social interaction in learning, which positions the teacher as a facilitator in the formation of interpersonal relationships among students. In the context of inclusive education, the teacher functions as a liaison who helps students understand social interaction norms that support the involvement of all class members without discrimination (Schwab, 2021). Furthermore, the social constructivist approach emphasizes that the learning process occurs through interactions mediated by individuals with more competent roles, in this case the teacher as the director of class social dynamics (Vygotsky in Lestari, 2022). Therefore, the teacher's role as a social mediator is crucial in establishing a structure of social cohesion that enables autistic students to actively participate in learning activities.

The findings of this study also align with recent research showing that teachers' active involvement in guiding students' social interactions significantly contributes to increasing the social participation of students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. Teachers who consistently facilitate communication between students have been shown to reduce the social distance between regular students and autistic students, creating a more open and participatory learning environment (Garrote et al., 2021). Other research also shows that the teacher's role as a social mediator is a crucial factor in fostering peer acceptance of students with special needs because the teacher serves as a guide to social interaction norms in the classroom (De Boer & Pijl, 2020). Thus, the teacher's role as a social mediator significantly contributes to strengthening social cohesion among students in inclusive learning.

Based on the description, it can be understood that the role of teachers as social mediators is one of the important impacts of pedagogical interactions that support the formation of social cohesion in inclusive classes. Teachers not only function as transmitters of learning materials, but also as directors of social relations between students, thus creating a more inclusive and participatory learning environment. This role helps regular students understand the importance of working together without discriminating against friends and provides opportunities for autistic students to engage in learning activities continuously. Thus, the role of teachers as social mediators is an important indicator of the success of learning interactions in building social cohesion between regular students and autistic students at SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands.

CONCLUSION

Teacher interactions with autistic students at SD Inpres Benteng Jampea No. 57, Selayar Islands, are conducted through tailored communication, individual mentoring, involvement in learning activities, and continuous emotional support. These interactions help autistic students remain engaged in the learning process and support the creation of an inclusive classroom environment. In addition, teacher interactions have a positive impact on social cohesion between autistic students and regular students, as seen in increased social acceptance, empathy, and cooperation between students in learning activities. This social cohesion is supported by the active role of teachers, the open attitude of regular students, group learning, and inclusive communication. Despite obstacles such as limited communication among autistic students, uneven understanding among regular students, limited teacher competency, and a lack of supporting facilities, social cohesion can still develop gradually through teacher-facilitated interactions in daily learning.

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