Effectiveness of Group Guidance Using Finger Painting Games To Improve Social Interaction Among Children with Special Needs in Inclusive Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of group counseling using finger painting games to improve the social interaction of children with special needs (ABK) in inclusive secondary schools. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative analysis (Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test) and qualitative analysis (observations and interviews). The participants were seven students categorized as borderline. Quantitative results demonstrated a significant increase in social interaction scores ($p < 0.05$), which was supported by qualitative observations of increased cooperation, communication, and participation. The findings suggest that incorporating finger painting activities into group counseling offers a fun, creative, and effective approach to enhancing social interaction among children with special needs in inclusive settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Children with special needs (also referred to as ABK) are those who experience physical, intellectual, emotional, or social barriers that affect their development and require specialized education services [1]. The barriers they encounter, particularly in communication and social interaction, make it challenging for them to adapt to their surroundings [2]. Therefore, an educational approach that is friendly, adaptive, and responsive to their needs is required, so that every child has an equal opportunity to develop optimally in an inclusive environment.

Globally, there are approximately 240 million children with disabilities, or one in ten children [3]. South Asia has the highest number (64.4 million), followed by East Asia and the Pacific (43.1 million). In Indonesia, the number of children with disabilities is estimated to be between 425,000 and nearly 2 million, but only a small proportion have access to formal education. Based on data from the Coordinating Ministry for Human

Development and Culture [4], approximately 3.3% of children aged 5–19 have disabilities, equivalent to 2.19 million people; however, only 12.26% attend special schools or inclusive schools [5]. UNICEF (2023) emphasizes that the main barriers for children with disabilities are not only physical, but also social, structural, and economic. The latest data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology [6] shows that of the 40,164 formal schools in Indonesia with students with special needs, only 5,956 (14.83%) have special guidance teachers. This gap shows that schools in Indonesia are not yet fully prepared to provide optimal inclusive education services.

One group of children with special needs that often goes unidentified is children with *borderline* conditions, namely those with IQs between 70 and 84. Children in this category are not classified as mentally disabled, but they experience difficulties in learning and social interaction, making them vulnerable to falling behind without special services [7]. Social interaction itself is a form of interpersonal relationship that is established through contact and communication to meet mutual needs [8]. For children with special needs, social interaction skills are crucial because they form the foundation for building relationships, fostering cooperation, and developing independence in social environments. One effective guidance service to enhance these skills is group counseling. According to Nisrina [9], this service helps children with special needs develop social skills through group dynamics. Ishomuddin [10] adds that group counseling utilizes discussions and interactions among members to foster understanding and solve problems. Thus, group counseling is not only a means of understanding but also a valuable direct social experience for participants [11].

Previous studies have demonstrated that group counseling is effective in enhancing the social skills of children with special needs. For example, Syahran et al. [12] found that this service improved associative social interaction among people with intellectual disabilities at YPAC Semarang and autistic students at SMP-LB Muzdalifah Medan. Through group activities, students learn to manage their emotions and build positive social relationships [13]. The novelty of this research lies in integrating group counseling with finger painting activities, which serve not only as a fun medium of expression but also as a means to develop fine motor and social skills through cooperation. Despite its great potential, the use of this medium in inclusive education remains rare in Indonesia. Initial interviews with counselors and assistant teachers at inclusive schools showed that some children with special needs still have difficulty interacting with their peers, tend to be isolated, and are less active in class activities. Therefore, this study focuses on the implementation process and effectiveness of group counseling services, utilizing finger painting as a medium to enhance social interaction among children with special needs, as a concrete step towards realizing inclusive education that is fair, friendly, and oriented towards the needs of all students.

2. METHOD

The research subjects were seven students with borderline special needs enrolled at SMAN 4 Palu, an inclusive secondary school in Palu City, Central Sulawesi. The sample was selected purposively based on the results of identification by guidance counselors and

special assistant teachers. Participant criteria included: (1) having an IQ in the range of 70–84 (*borderline)*, (2) demonstrating difficulties in social interaction in the school environment, and (3) willingness to participate in all intervention sessions. Participants were six male students and one female student, aged 15 to 17 years.

Social interaction was measured using a questionnaire based on indicators of cooperation, communication, empathy, and social participation. The questionnaire used a 1–4 Likert scale and had been tested for content validity by counseling experts, with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.86$, indicating high internal consistency. In addition, the researchers used observation sheets to record students' social behavior during the activities, including their level of activity, cooperation, and appreciation of their group members.

The intervention consisted of eight group counseling sessions conducted over a four-week period. Each session lasted 45 minutes and consisted of an opening phase, core activities, and group reflection.

a. Sessions 1–2: Introduction of group members, establishment of group norms, and *ice-breaking* activities to build a sense of security and togetherness.

b. Sessions 3–6: *Finger painting* activities with themes of self-expression and group cooperation. Students were asked to paint together using their fingers with colors that represented certain feelings or messages, followed by group discussions about their work.

c. Sessions 7–8: Group reflection and evaluation, where students share their experiences and the changes they feel in interacting with their friends.

The guidance counselor and researcher co-facilitated all activities. Observations were made throughout the process to record group dynamics and changes in students' social behavior. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe changes in scores before and after the intervention, and the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test to test the significance of differences between pre-test and post-test scores at the 0.05 significance level. Meanwhile, qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed using a thematic coding approach, grouping patterns of student behavior, such as increased cooperation, greater courage to express opinions, and improved communication skills.

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of research ethics in education. Written consent was obtained from the students' parents or guardians, and the Principal of SMAN 4 Palu granted official permission. The students' identities were kept confidential, and all participation was voluntary and not coerced.
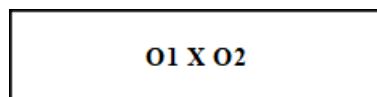
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Figure 1. Research Design

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

a.   Quantitative Research Results

1) Results of Descriptive Analysis of Pre-Test (Before Service)

Based on Table 1, it is known that the classification of social interaction of children with special needs (ABK) before being given group guidance services from 7 students who were the subjects of the study, namely 2 or 29% of students had high social interaction with children with special needs (ABK), and 3 or 42% of students had moderate social interaction with children with special needs (ABK), and 2 or 29% of students had low social interaction with children with special needs (ABK).

Table 1. Pre-test social interaction scores of children with special needs (ABK) before receiving group counseling services

No	Interval Class	Classification	F (Frequency)	%
1	94-140	High	2	29
2	47-93	Medium	3	42
3	0-46	Low	2	29
	Total		7	100

2) Post-Test Descriptive Analysis Results (After Service)

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that the classification of social interaction among children with special needs (ABK) after receiving group counseling services from the seven students who were the subjects of the study, namely 5 or 71% of students had high social interaction among children with special needs (ABK), and 2 or 29% of students had moderate social interaction among children with special needs (ABK).

Table 2. Post-test scores for social interaction among children with special needs (ABK) after receiving group counseling services.

No	Interval Class	Classification	F (Frequency)	%
1	94-140	High	5	71
2	47-93	Medium	2	29
3	0-46	Low	0	0
	Total		7	10

3) Description of the Level of Social Interaction of Children with Special Needs (ABK) Before and After Receiving Group Counseling

Based on Table 3, 7 students experienced increased social interaction among children with special needs (ABK) after receiving counseling services. This indicates that providing group counseling services enhances the social interaction of children with special needs (ABK).

Table 3. Description of the Level of Social Interaction of Children with Special
Needs (ABK) Before and After Group Guidance

Subject	Before Receiving Lessons		After Receiving Lessons		Description
	Percentage	Classification	Percentage	Classification	
MDA	42	Moderate	71	High	Increasing
MAA	42	Moderate	71	High	Increasing
DIA	42	Moderate	71	High	Increasing
MA	29	High	71	High	Increasing
FA	29	Low	29	Moderate	Increasing
ZI	29	High	71	High	Increasing
Father	29	Low	29	Moderate	Increased

4) Wilcoxon Test Results

Hypothesis testing in this study was conducted using IBM SPSS version 25.0 with the nonparametric Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. The test was chosen because the data were ordinal and did not meet the assumptions of normality. The test results can be seen in Tables 4 and 5 below:

Table 4. Results of the Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test

Rank

		N	Average Rank	Number of Ranks
POST-TEST - PRE-TEST	Negative Rating	0a	0.00	0.00
	Positive Rating	6b	3.50	21
	Bond	1c		
	All	7		

a. POST-TEST < PRE-TEST

b. POST-TEST > INITIAL TEST

c. POST TEST = PRE TEST

Table 5. Wilcoxon Test Statistical Results

Test Statistics	
	POST-TEST - PRE-TEST
Z	-2.201b
Asimpa. Sig. (2 tails)	.028
Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	
b Based on negative ranks.	

Based on the results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test shown in Tables 4 and 5, it is known that six students experienced an increase in social interaction scores after being given group counseling services (positive rank), one student whose social interaction was high both before and after group counseling services were provided (ties). The Z-value = -2.201b and the significance value (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) is 0.028, which is less than the significance level of 0.05.

b. Qualitative Research Results: Interview Results

Table 6. Interview Results

No	Aspect	Researcher's Questions	MDA	MMA	DIA	MS	FA	ZI	Father
1	**Attention**	When your friends are playing, what do you like to watch them play?	*"Playing futsal"*	*"Playing Mobile Legends"*	*"Playing volleyball"*	*"Playing basketball"*	*"Playing guitar"*	*"Playing soccer"*	*"Playing badminton"*
2		When the teacher is speaking, what do you usually do?	*"Doodle"*	*"Playing with my phone"*	*"Chatting"*	*"Leaving the room"*	*"Daydreaming"*	*"Drawing"*	*"Playing with a pen"*
3		Who is the serious friend you see in class or outside of class?	*"Budi"*	*"Rani"*	*"Siska"*	*"Dedi"*	*"Tono"*	*"Laila"*	*"Agus"*
4		Have you ever seen your friends share something?	*"Yes, food."*	*"Yes, drinks"*	*"Yes, snacks"*	*"Yes, books"*	*"Yes, pencils"*	*"Yes, fried foods"*	*"Yes, candy"*
5		Have you ever seen a friend who is friendly to everyone? What is he like?	*"Yes, likes to smile"*	*"Yes, likes to greet people"*	*"Yes, likes to help"*	*"Yes, polite"*	*"Yes, they have many friends."*	*"Yes, they like to chat"*	*"Yes, kind to everyone"*
6	**Retention**	Have you ever played like your friends? If so, what did you play?	*"Playing futsal for for a while"*	*"Playing Mobile Legends"*	*"Playing volleyball"*	*"Playing basketball"*	*"Singing along with accompanied by a guitar"*	*"Playing soccer"*	*"Singing karaoke together "*
7		Have you ever tried saying "Sorry" or "Thank you" like your friends?	*"Say thank you to the teacher"*	*"Say sorry when you're late"*	*"Say thank you for borrowing the book"*	*"Say sorry to your friends"*	*"Say thank you for the food"*	*"Say sorry when joking around"*	*"Say thank you for being helped"*
8		Have you ever helped someone after seeing your friend help someone else?	*"Help carry a chair"*	*"Help sweep the classroom "*	*"Pick up the fallen book"*	*"Bring a water bottle"*	*"Tidy up the table"*	*"Help carry the bag"*	*"Help a friend write"*
9		Have you ever imitated the way your friends greet teachers or classmates?	*"Say assalamualaikum"*	*"Wave your hand"*	*"Greet them with a smile"*	*"Shake hands with the teacher"*	*"Good morning"*	*"Give a high five"*	*"Wave goodbye"*
10		When you see your friends being kind, have you ever	*"Help too"*	*"Greet the teacher"*	*"Smile at people"*	*"Say thank you too"*	*"Get something for your friend"*	*"Say sorry"*	*"Be kind to others"*

No	Aspect	Researcher's Questions	MDA	MMA	DIA	MS	FA	ZI	Father
		tried doing the same?							
11	**Reproduction**	What do you do when a friend is sad?	*"Stay with them and comfort them."*	*"Tell them not to be sad"*	*"Hug them and invite them to play"*	*"Ask them why"*	*"Share snacks to make their happy"*	*"Engage in conversation"*	*"Give encouragement"*
12		When your friend drops a book, what do you do?	*"Pick up the book"*	*"Help pick it up"*	*"Help immediately"*	*"Pick it up and give it to them"*	*"Tell them to be careful"*	*"Help me get it"*	*"Help tidy up"*
13		If your friend asks for help, what do you usually do?	*"Help as much as I can"*	*"Help if I can"*	*"Help immediately"*	*"Ask what kind of help they need"*	*"Help as much as I can"*	*"Help quickly"*	*"I will definitely help"*
14		If you see a friend doing something wrong, what do you do?	*"Tell them nicely"*	*"Tell them not to do it again"*	*"Explain it gently"*	*"Tell the teacher"*	*"Give them advice"*	*"Remind them"*	*"Ask them to apologize"*
15		When you see your friends being polite to teachers, do you do the same?	*"Follow"*	*"Greet them"*	*"Say assalamualaikum"*	*"Bow respectfully"*	*"Say hello"*	*"Smile at the teacher"*	*"Shake hands"*
16	**Motivation**	Do you feel happy when your teacher or friends say that you are a good child?	*"Happy to feel appreciated"*	*"Happy to be encouraged"*	*"Happy to feel confident"*	*"Very proud"*	*"Happy to feel calm"*	*"It feels good to want to be diligent"*	*"Happy enough to smile at myself"*
17		In your opinion, what makes you want to be kind to your friends?	*"My friends are good to me"*	*"So that my friends will help me"*	*"I am happy to see my friends happy"*	*"So my friends won't get angry"*	*"I want to have many friends"*	*"So that my friends feel comfortable"*	*"I want caring friends"*
18		If you see your friends helping others and getting praise, would you want to try it too?	*"I want to be praised"*	*"Help"*	*"Happy to be praised"*	*"Friends say it's good"*	*"Want to be imitated"*	*"Helping"*	*"Want to be praised too"*
19		If your friends like you, do you want to be even better?	*"Want to be better"*	*"So I can have more friends"*	*"Want to be more liked"*	*"Want my friends to feel comfortable"*	*"So I won't be shunned"*	*"To make it easier to socialize"*	*"To be accepted"*
20		Have you ever helped a friend because you wanted to get praise?	*"Yes, so the teacher will say I'm good"*	*"Yes, so my friends will praise me"*	*"Yes, so the teacher will praise me."*	*"Yes, so I'll be considered smart."*	*"Yes, I want my friends to say I'm friendly."*	*"Yes, so my friends will praise me."*	*"Yes, so that my teacher will say I am good."*

Based on Table 6 of the interview results above, which include data from seven students, it can be seen that students possess fairly good social skills and motivation when interacting in the school environment. They can pay attention to their friends' behavior, recognize positive actions, and imitate prosocial behaviors such as helping, greeting, and being polite to teachers and friends. Most respondents also showed empathy and concern, for example, by comforting sad friends, helping those in need, and reprimanding friends who had done something wrong, even if it was unintentional. This indicates that students not only imitate but also internalize the positive social values they learn from their environment.

In terms of motivation, students feel happy and proud when they receive praise or recognition from teachers and friends. Feeling appreciated motivates them to continue behaving well and maintaining harmonious social relationships [14].

In addition, motivation also arises from the desire to be accepted and have many friends. Overall, the interview results show that students' social behavior and motivation are shaped through a process of attention, imitation, and reinforcement in daily interactions [15]. The school environment, particularly the roles of teachers and peers, plays a crucial role in fostering empathy, concern, and positive motivation in students.

3.2. Discussion

The pre-test results show that social interaction among children with special needs (ABK) in inclusive schools remains relatively low. The average score is below the minimum achievement threshold, with symptoms such as passivity, isolation, and a lack of initiative to interact. This condition aligns with the findings of Hitthotunnahdliyyah and Badaw [16] and Pautina et al. [17], which state that the primary obstacle for children with special needs in social interaction is difficulty with communication and social contact. These obstacles vary according to the type and level of the child's needs, such as children with special needs or autism who experience difficulties with social responses and nonverbal communication [18].

Group counseling is an activity in which information is conveyed to a group of students to help them develop plans and make appropriate decisions [19]. Group counseling aims to develop social potential, communication skills, and positive attitudes towards the environment [20]. After implementing group counseling through finger painting, the post-test results showed a significant improvement: all participants moved into the high category for the following skills: formative, cooperation, and sharing. Finger painting proved effective because it provided a channel for nonverbal expression and enjoyable sensory experiences, helping children relax, become bolder in their interactions, and feel more confident. Research by Mustaqim [7] shows that art activities like this help children channel their emotions and reduce communication barriers. Mareza and Nugroho [21] also demonstrate that finger painting fosters social interaction and collaboration among students through group activities that require cooperation and mutual respect.

Theoretically, the increase in social interaction observed in this study aligns with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes learning through social collaboration. Finger painting facilitates guided interaction (scaffolding), enabling students to internalize

cooperative behavior in a group context. Furthermore, these results also reinforce Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that children learn through observation, imitation, and social reinforcement. In the context of group counseling, *finger painting* activities help participants develop practical social skills such as sharing, taking turns, and empathetic communication. These results are consistent with a study [22] that confirms nonverbal expressive activities can improve social interaction among children with special needs in inclusive schools.

From a practical standpoint, finger painting can be an accessible tool for counselors and teachers to promote inclusion through sensory engagement and nonverbal communication. This approach can complement traditional guidance models in inclusive classrooms, especially for students who have barriers to verbal communication [23]. By incorporating elements of play and creative expression, teachers and counselors can build an environment that is more responsive to the social and emotional needs of students with special needs.

However, this study has several limitations, including a Small sample size (n = 7), limiting the generalizability of the results, the absence of a control group, which makes direct comparisons with other interventions impossible, and the short duration of the intervention (8 sessions), which may not be sufficient to observe long-term changes. Therefore, future research should replicate this approach with a larger sample, include a control group, and use other creative media, such as clay modeling or music therapy, to validate and expand on these findings [25], [23]. Overall, the results of this study indicate that group counseling services using *finger painting* as a medium are an effective, creative, and enjoyable approach to improving social interaction in inclusive schools for children with special needs [25].

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research conducted on the effect of providing group counseling services with finger painting games to improve social interaction in children with special needs (ABK), the following conclusions can be drawn:

a. Before receiving group counseling services, some children with special needs had low levels of social interaction. This indicates that group counseling services are crucial in helping them adapt and interact effectively within the school social environment.

b. After receiving group counseling services, there was a significant increase in social interaction among children with special needs. A total of 7 students showed an increase in social interaction scores from the pre-test to the post-test.

c. Based on the results of the *finger painting* group guidance service, a noticeable improvement was observed after the service was provided. This shows that the intervention had a positive effect on improving students' social interaction skills.

The results of this study indicate that *guidance counselors and special education assistant teachers can utilize finger painting activities as a creative medium in group counseling services with*in inclusive schools. This approach not only enhances social interaction but also strengthens students' emotional involvement and cooperation. Thus,

this technique can be used as an alternative social learning strategy that is enjoyable, adaptive, and easily integrated into classroom activities.

Further research should involve a larger number of participants, use control groups, and examine the effectiveness of other creative media such as music therapy or collage art to broaden our understanding of the development of social interaction among children with special needs in inclusive environments.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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