

IMPACT AND PROBLEMS OF DISORDERS IN CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

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Children with special needs encounter multidimensional challenges that influence their physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and educational development. This study aimed to examine the impacts of disabilities, identify the major problems experienced by children with special needs in family, school, and community settings, and explore evidence-based strategies to support their optimal development. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was employed by synthesizing peer-reviewed articles, books, and scientific publications published between 2020 and 2025. Relevant literature was identified through major academic databases, screened according to predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and analyzed using thematic synthesis. The review revealed that disabilities affect not only children's physical growth and cognitive functioning but also their emotional well-being, social participation, self-confidence, and independence. Family-related problems include inadequate parental acceptance, psychological stress, economic burdens, inappropriate parenting practices, and limited social support. School-related challenges involve insufficient teacher competence, limited inclusive learning facilities, inadequate individualized instruction, and barriers to social interaction. Meanwhile, community-related problems are primarily associated with stigma, discrimination, stereotypes, and limited accessibility to inclusive public services. The findings further demonstrate that successful intervention requires collaborative efforts among families, schools, counselors, governments, and communities through inclusive education, early intervention, family empowerment, professional support services, and public awareness campaigns. Strengthening inclusive policies and promoting positive societal attitudes are essential for ensuring equal educational opportunities and improving the overall quality of life of children with special needs.



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INTRODUCTION

Children with special needs (CSNs) are individuals who experience physical, intellectual, emotional, sensory, behavioral, or developmental conditions that differ from those of typically developing children, thereby requiring educational services, care, and interventions tailored to their individual characteristics (Fakhiratunnisa et al., 2022). These differences should not be interpreted as limitations but rather as unique characteristics requiring comprehensive support to enable children to achieve their maximum developmental potential. In Indonesia, the rights of children with special needs are legally protected through Law Number 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities, which guarantees equal rights to education, health care, accessibility, and social participation without discrimination (Tea et al., 2023). These legal provisions demonstrate the government's commitment to promoting inclusive education and

ensuring equal opportunities for all children regardless of their disabilities.

Despite these legal protections, children with special needs continue to encounter numerous challenges that affect their academic achievement, psychological well-being, social participation, and overall quality of life. Their developmental outcomes are influenced not only by the severity of their disabilities but also by environmental factors, particularly support provided by families, schools, and communities (Fakhiratunnisa et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2020). According to the ecological systems theory, children's development is strongly shaped by interactions between individuals and their surrounding environments. Consequently, inadequate environmental support often becomes a more significant obstacle than the disability itself (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The family constitutes the first and most influential environment in the development of children with special needs. Parents play a central role in providing emotional support, early intervention, and appropriate stimulation throughout childhood. However, many parents still experience difficulties in understanding the characteristics and educational needs of their children, resulting in inappropriate parenting practices such as overprotection, inconsistent discipline, or insufficient developmental stimulation (Harahap, 2024; Mudrikallistanto et al., 2024). Furthermore, socioeconomic conditions, parental education, psychological stress, and limited access to information frequently reduce parents' capacity to provide optimal care (Amanullah & Kharisma, 2022; Nurhayati et al., 2023). Such conditions may hinder children's independence, social competence, emotional regulation, and self-confidence.

Schools represent another essential environment for promoting the holistic development of children with special needs. Inclusive education has become an international educational priority because it seeks to provide equal learning opportunities regardless of students' abilities or disabilities (UNESCO, 2020). Nevertheless, the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia remains inconsistent. Many schools continue to experience shortages of adaptive learning materials, accessible infrastructure, specialized educational resources, and teachers adequately prepared to address diverse learning needs (Ashari, 2022; Fithriyah et al., 2024). Teachers frequently encounter difficulties in modifying instructional strategies, assessing students fairly, and managing inclusive classrooms effectively (Sarita et al., 2023). These limitations may reduce learning motivation, academic achievement, and social participation among children with special needs while simultaneously increasing the risk of educational exclusion (Novi Cahya Dewi, 2025).

Besides family and school environments, community attitudes significantly influence the experiences of children with special needs. Although public awareness regarding disability rights has improved during recent years, negative stereotypes, discrimination, and social stigma remain prevalent in many communities (Ramadhini & Selian, 2025). Children with special needs are often underestimated, excluded from social activities, or viewed primarily through the lens of their disabilities rather than their abilities (Chairani et al., 2024). Such experiences negatively affect children's self-esteem, emotional well-being, and social adaptation while limiting opportunities for meaningful participation within society (Qistan et al., 2024). Creating disability-friendly communities therefore requires continuous public education and collaborative efforts among government institutions, educational organizations, and civil society.

The rapid development of digital technology has introduced additional opportunities and challenges for children with special needs. Digital learning platforms, assistive technologies,

and online educational resources have expanded access to information and individualized learning experiences. Conversely, excessive technology use without appropriate supervision may contribute to developmental delays, reduced social interaction, and behavioral problems (Mardiyah, 2022). Therefore, technology should be integrated carefully into educational practices while considering children's developmental characteristics and individual needs.

The complexity of these issues demonstrates that supporting children with special needs cannot rely solely on educational institutions. Effective intervention requires strong collaboration among families, schools, healthcare professionals, counselors, policymakers, and community organizations. Teachers, particularly guidance and counseling professionals, play an important role in identifying students' needs, facilitating social adjustment, promoting psychological well-being, and supporting inclusive learning environments (Edy et al., 2025; Trisabayanti, 2022). Similarly, parents and communities must work together to create environments that encourage acceptance, participation, and equal opportunities for all children (Herawati et al., 2025; Yanuar et al., 2023).

Previous studies have primarily examined individual aspects of children with special needs, including parenting patterns (Amanullah & Kharisma, 2022), inclusive education (Tea et al., 2023), learning barriers (Fithriyah et al., 2024), family support (Nurhayati et al., 2023), and community perceptions (Ramadhini & Selian, 2025). However, relatively few studies have comprehensively synthesized these interconnected issues from the perspectives of family, school, and society while simultaneously discussing their impacts and potential solutions. Addressing these dimensions collectively is essential because children's development results from interactions among multiple ecological systems rather than isolated factors.

Therefore, this article aims to analyze comprehensively the impacts and major problems experienced by children with special needs within family, school, and community environments. Furthermore, this study identifies practical strategies that can strengthen inclusive education, improve family support, reduce social stigma, and optimize children's developmental outcomes. Using a library research approach, this article synthesizes recent empirical findings and theoretical perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by children with special needs. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically to the advancement of inclusive education and guidance and counseling literature, and practically by providing recommendations for educators, parents, policymakers, and communities to develop more inclusive, supportive, and equitable environments for children with special needs.

METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to comprehensively examine the impacts, challenges, and support strategies for children with special needs across family, school, and community settings. A systematic review was selected because it provides a transparent, rigorous, and reproducible approach to identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing evidence from previous studies, thereby minimizing selection bias and strengthening the reliability of research findings (Snyder, 2019; Page et al., 2021). The review process was conducted following the principles of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020), which consisted of four major stages: identification,

screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of relevant studies (Page et al., 2021). Literature was retrieved from several international and national scientific databases, including Scopus, ScienceDirect, ERIC, Crossref, and Google Scholar, using combinations of keywords such as *children with special needs*, *inclusive education*, *special education*, *family support*, *school environment*, *community participation*, *inclusive learning*, and *disability*. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference proceedings published between 2020 and 2025, written in English or Indonesian, and directly addressing the educational, psychological, or social aspects of children with special needs were included. Duplicate publications, non-peer-reviewed documents, opinion papers, and studies that did not align with the research objectives were excluded from the review (Xiao & Watson, 2019; Okoli, 2015).

Following the screening process, the selected studies were subjected to thematic synthesis, allowing the integration of findings from diverse methodological approaches into coherent analytical themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Data extraction focused on publication characteristics, research objectives, participant characteristics, study design, key findings, and practical recommendations. The synthesized evidence was subsequently categorized into five major themes: (1) the impacts of disabilities on child development, (2) family-related challenges, (3) educational barriers in inclusive schools, (4) community perceptions and social inclusion, and (5) intervention and support strategies for optimizing child development. This analytical approach enables researchers to compare findings across studies, identify recurring patterns, and highlight inconsistencies within the existing literature (Snyder, 2019). Furthermore, systematic literature reviews serve not only to summarize existing evidence but also to establish stronger theoretical foundations, identify knowledge gaps, and formulate recommendations for future research and educational policy development (Tranfield et al., 2003; Booth et al., 2022). Consequently, the present review provides a comprehensive evidence-based understanding of the multidimensional challenges experienced by children with special needs while offering practical implications for families, educators, policymakers, and communities in fostering more inclusive educational environments.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Impacts of Disabilities on Children with Special Needs

The reviewed studies consistently indicate that disabilities affect multiple developmental domains of children with special needs, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. These dimensions are closely interconnected, meaning that limitations in one domain frequently influence children's functioning in other aspects of life.

Physical Impacts

Physical development is one of the most fundamental aspects of child development because it supports mobility, independence, and participation in everyday activities. The reviewed literature shows that children with special needs commonly experience delays in both gross and fine motor development, including difficulties in walking, running, maintaining balance, writing, drawing, and manipulating objects (Widodo & Masnawati, 2024; Mangkuwibawa et al., 2025). These limitations are generally associated with impaired neuromuscular coordination and reduced muscle strength.

Motor impairments also reduce children's opportunities to participate in physical education, recreational activities, and peer interactions. As a consequence, many children

become less physically active, easily fatigued, and increasingly dependent on others in performing daily tasks. Previous studies further demonstrate that prolonged physical limitations negatively influence children's self-confidence, independence, and social participation (Ilmu et al., 2024; Mangkuwibawa et al., 2025). Therefore, early physical intervention, physiotherapy, adaptive sports programs, and family support are essential to optimize children's physical functioning.

Cognitive Impacts

Another prominent finding concerns cognitive development. Children with special needs frequently experience difficulties in attention, memory, information processing, reasoning, and problem-solving. These cognitive limitations often result from developmental disorders, intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, or specific learning disabilities (Fithriyah et al., 2024).

Several studies consistently report that cognitive barriers reduce children's ability to understand classroom instruction, complete academic tasks, and acquire abstract concepts (Sarita et al., 2023; Yanuar et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the literature also demonstrates that cognitive performance can be substantially improved through individualized instruction, differentiated learning strategies, assistive learning media, and inclusive educational practices that accommodate individual learning characteristics (Yanuar et al., 2023).

Social and Emotional Impacts

Social and emotional difficulties constitute another major challenge for children with special needs. Many studies reveal that children frequently experience communication difficulties, limited peer interaction, emotional instability, anxiety, frustration, and reduced self-esteem (Mardliyah, 2022; Fithriyah et al., 2024).

Social exclusion, negative peer attitudes, and inadequate communication skills often reduce children's participation in collaborative learning and community activities. Emotional problems further aggravate these difficulties because children frequently struggle to regulate emotions appropriately, leading to impulsive behaviors or social withdrawal. Consequently, inadequate social-emotional development may hinder academic achievement and overall quality of life. The literature therefore emphasizes the importance of emotional support from families, teachers, and peers to strengthen children's resilience and social adaptation (Rahayu, 2023; Mardliyah, 2022).

Environmental Problems Affecting Children with Special Needs

The findings further demonstrate that challenges experienced by children with special needs are not solely attributable to their disabilities but are substantially influenced by environmental conditions. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory explains that child development is strongly affected by interactions within family, school, and community environments.

Family-Related Problems

The family represents the primary environment influencing children's development. However, parents frequently experience psychological stress, emotional burden, financial constraints, and difficulties accepting their child's condition (Nurhayati et al., 2023; Mudrikallistanto et al., 2024).

The review identifies several recurring family-related challenges, including inadequate parental acceptance, inappropriate parenting styles, limited paternal involvement, insufficient emotional support, and financial burdens associated with therapy and specialized education (Asfari, 2022; Amanullah & Kharisma, 2022; Herawati et al., 2025). These factors significantly affect children's emotional security, independence, and educational development.

School-Related Problems

Schools remain one of the most challenging environments for children with special needs despite the implementation of inclusive education policies. The literature consistently reports shortages of qualified teachers, inadequate inclusive teaching competencies, limited adaptive learning media, insufficient assistive facilities, and poor collaboration between schools and parents (Ashari, 2022; Lestari, 2024).

Many teachers continue to experience difficulties in modifying instructional strategies according to students' individual needs. Consequently, children frequently encounter learning barriers, social exclusion, and behavioral difficulties during classroom activities (Sarita et al., 2023; Rizqi, 2025). These findings indicate that successful inclusive education depends not only on student readiness but also on institutional capacity and teacher professional competence.

Community-Related Problems

The community also plays a significant role in children's development. Nevertheless, many reviewed studies indicate that stigma, discrimination, stereotypes, and social exclusion remain major barriers to children's participation in society (Meka Marsiatius et al., 2023; Ramadhini & Selian, 2025).

Children with special needs are often perceived as incapable, dependent, or burdensome, limiting their educational opportunities and community participation. Such misconceptions contribute to reduced self-confidence and restricted social integration. Therefore, increasing public awareness regarding disability rights and promoting inclusive community attitudes remain critical priorities.

Strategies for Supporting Children with Special Needs

The literature consistently emphasizes that effective intervention requires collaboration among families, schools, governments, and communities.

Parents are expected to provide emotional security, balanced nutrition, appropriate parenting practices, educational stimulation, and continuous motivation to facilitate children's development (Harahap, 2024). Acceptance and active parental involvement are consistently identified as protective factors supporting children's psychological well-being and educational achievement.

Within schools, guidance and counseling teachers play an essential role by providing individualized counseling services, educational guidance, career planning, social skills training, and collaboration with multidisciplinary professionals (Trisabayanti, 2022; Edy et al., 2025). Early identification and individualized assessment further enable teachers to develop intervention programs tailored to students' specific needs.

Community participation is equally important for promoting inclusive education. Public awareness campaigns, accessible public facilities, supportive educational policies, and

community engagement contribute significantly to reducing stigma while improving children's opportunities for social participation (Chairani, 2024; UNESCO, 2020). Sustainable collaboration among educational institutions, families, health professionals, policymakers, and local communities is therefore essential for ensuring equal educational opportunities and improving the quality of life of children with special needs.

Overall, the evidence synthesized in this review demonstrates that children with special needs encounter multidimensional challenges extending beyond their disabilities. Their development is substantially shaped by family support, educational quality, and community acceptance. Consequently, inclusive policies should move beyond providing educational access alone and instead establish comprehensive support systems that integrate educational, psychological, social, and health services. Such an integrated approach is fundamental to maximizing children's developmental potential and promoting equitable participation in society.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review demonstrates that children with special needs experience complex and interconnected challenges that extend beyond their disabilities to include physical, cognitive, emotional, social, educational, and environmental dimensions. The review indicates that the quality of family support, inclusive educational practices, teacher competence, and community acceptance substantially influence children's developmental outcomes. Although children with special needs possess diverse abilities and significant developmental potential, inadequate support systems, social stigma, and limited accessibility continue to hinder their participation and overall well-being.

Addressing these multidimensional challenges requires coordinated collaboration among parents, educators, school counselors, healthcare professionals, policymakers, and the broader community. Evidence from the reviewed literature suggests that inclusive education, early intervention, adaptive learning strategies, family empowerment, and increased public awareness are fundamental to promoting children's independence and quality of life. Therefore, strengthening inclusive educational policies and developing supportive environments at family, school, and community levels should become strategic priorities to ensure that every child with special needs has equal opportunities to learn, participate, and achieve their full potential.

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