

The Influence Of Empathy and Social Sensitivity On Acceptance Of Peer With Disabilities Among Islamic Counseling Students

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To cite this article: Oktafia, U., Nurfitri, I., Cahya, A., Aulia, I., Setyowati, R., and Edy, S. (2026). The Influence Of Empathy and Social Sensitivity On Acceptance Of Peer With Disabilities Among Islamic Counseling Students. *Paramartha: Journal of Islamic Guidance and Counselling in Education*, 2(1), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.37366/pigce.v2i1.16>

Articles Information	Abstrak
<p>Received : 10-01-2026</p> <p>Accepted : 15-01-2026</p> <p>Revised : 21-01-2026</p> <p>Published : 30-01-2026</p>	<p>Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh empati dan sensitivitas sosial terhadap penerimaan rekan penyandang disabilitas pada mahasiswa Program Studi Bimbingan dan Konseling Pendidikan Islam Universitas Pelita Bangsa. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode survei terhadap 81 mahasiswa BKPI. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner berskala Likert dan dianalisis menggunakan regresi linier berganda. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa empati dan sensitivitas sosial berpengaruh positif dan signifikan, baik secara parsial maupun simultan, terhadap penerimaan rekan disabilitas. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa dengan tingkat empati dan sensitivitas sosial yang tinggi cenderung memiliki sikap yang lebih terbuka, inklusif, dan menghargai keberagaman. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya penguatan empati dan sensitivitas sosial bagi calon konselor dalam mendukung terciptanya lingkungan kampus yang inklusif.</p> <p>Kata kunci: Empati; Sensitivitas Sosial; Penerimaan Sosial; Mahasiswa BKPI</p> <hr/> <p>Abstract</p> <p><i>This study aims to analyze the influence of empathy and social sensitivity on the acceptance of peers with disabilities among students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Education Program at Universitas Pelita Bangsa. This research employed a quantitative approach using a survey method involving 81 BKPI students. Data were collected through Likert-scale questionnaires and analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis. The results indicate that empathy and social sensitivity have a positive and significant effect, both partially and simultaneously, on the acceptance of peers with disabilities. These findings suggest that students with higher levels of empathy and social sensitivity tend to demonstrate more open, inclusive, and respectful attitudes toward diversity. This study emphasizes the importance of strengthening empathy and social sensitivity among prospective counselors to support the development of an inclusive campus environment.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Empathy; Social Sensitivity; Social Acceptance; Students with Disabilities</p>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Issues concerning persons with disabilities remain a critical concern in efforts to develop inclusive societies. According to UNICEF and the World Health Organization (2021), more than 15% of the global population lives with disabilities, indicating the substantial need for adequate social support systems. In Indonesia, the commitment to inclusivity is reinforced through Law Number 8 of 2016, which guarantees equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities in various aspects of life, including education. This regulation positions disability not merely as an individual limitation but as a collective social responsibility that requires adaptive, inclusive, and nondiscriminatory environments.

Despite the existence of inclusive legal frameworks, social dynamics in higher education institutions still present significant challenges. Previous studies reveal that the primary barriers experienced by students with disabilities are not limited to physical infrastructure but are often rooted in social aspects, such as stereotypes, social awkwardness, and limited interaction experience among nondisabled students. These social barriers may hinder participation, learning processes, and social relationships on campus.

Within the context of higher education, particularly at Universitas Pelita Bangsa, this issue becomes increasingly important. The Islamic Guidance and Counseling Education Program emphasizes the development of interpersonal competencies, including empathy, social awareness, and psychological understanding. As future educators and counselors, BKPI students are expected to demonstrate greater readiness in interacting inclusively with peers with disabilities. However, preliminary observations suggest that not all BKPI students possess sufficient confidence or understanding in such interactions.

Empathy is widely recognized as a fundamental factor influencing social acceptance. Davis (1983) describes empathy as the ability to understand and share the emotional experiences of others. Empirical evidence suggests that individuals with higher empathy levels tend to display lower prejudice toward persons with disabilities, enabling more natural and respectful interactions. In addition to empathy, social sensitivity plays a vital role in shaping inclusive social relationships. Social sensitivity refers to the ability to recognize social cues, interpret interpersonal signals, and adjust behavior appropriately to maintain comfortable interactions.

Although previous studies have examined empathy or social sensitivity separately, research investigating both variables simultaneously within the context of higher education, particularly at Universitas Pelita Bangsa, remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to address this research gap by examining the influence of empathy and social sensitivity on the acceptance of peers with disabilities among BKPI students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

Disability is no longer viewed solely as an individual deficit but rather as the result of interactions

between personal limitations and environmental barriers. The World Health Organization (2021) defines disability as a condition influenced by medical, psychological, social, and structural factors. In Indonesia, Law Number 8 of 2016 affirms the equal rights of persons with disabilities in educational, social, and cultural contexts, including access to higher education. This legal framework emphasizes that inclusion is not merely a matter of physical accessibility, but also of social acceptance and equal participation. Empirical studies indicate that students with disabilities in higher education frequently encounter non-physical barriers, such as social stigma, stereotypes, and limited peer understanding. Widinarsih (2019) highlights that awkwardness and uncertainty among nondisabled peers often lead to social distancing, which negatively affects the academic and social experiences of students with disabilities. Similarly, Widiarti and Handayani (2020) argue that social barriers can be more restrictive than infrastructural limitations, as they influence daily interactions, group work, and peer relationships on campus.

Within inclusive education settings, the presence of students with disabilities should foster openness, mutual respect, and empathy among students. However, Trihastuti (2022) notes that many university students continue to perceive disability primarily from a physical perspective, overlooking its psychological and social dimensions. This limited understanding may hinder the development of meaningful and equal interactions, underscoring the importance of fostering empathy and social awareness within higher education communities.

2.2. Empathy in Students Interactions

Empathy represents a core interpersonal competence that enables individuals to understand and emotionally connect with the experiences of others. Hoffman (2001) defines empathy as an affective response that is more congruent with another person's situation than one's own, while Rogers (1957) conceptualizes empathy as the ability to enter another individual's internal frame of reference without judgment. From a neuropsychological perspective, Decety and Jackson (2006) describe empathy as the brain's capacity to simulate the emotional states of others. In the context of higher education, empathy plays a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes toward peers with disabilities. Davis (1983) emphasizes that empathy underlies prosocial behavior and positive interpersonal relationships. Students who demonstrate high levels of empathy tend to exhibit lower levels of prejudice and greater openness toward diversity.

Empirical evidence supports this assertion, indicating that empathetic students are more likely to engage in supportive behaviors, communicate respectfully, and avoid stigmatizing attitudes toward peers with disabilities. Empathy can be understood through two primary dimensions: cognitive empathy and affective empathy. Cognitive empathy involves the ability to understand another person's perspective and emotional condition, while affective empathy refers to the capacity to emotionally resonate with another's experiences. Both dimensions are essential in inclusive campus environments, as they enable students to recognize the needs of peers with disabilities and respond with appropriate emotional and behavioral support.

2.2.1. Social Sensitivity in Peer Relationships

Social sensitivity refers to an individual's ability to perceive social cues, interpret interpersonal signals, and adapt behavior to situational demands. Baron and Byrne (2005) define social sensitivity as the competence to accurately read verbal and nonverbal cues in social interactions. Riggio (2005) positions social sensitivity as a fundamental component of social competence, while Goleman (2006) associates it with social awareness within the framework of emotional intelligence. In university settings characterized by social and cultural diversity, social sensitivity becomes increasingly important. Students with high social sensitivity are better equipped to navigate complex social situations, avoid inappropriate or excessive behaviors, and maintain respectful interactions. Garvin and Juniarti (2021) argue that social sensitivity contributes to the development of warm, cooperative, and inclusive peer relationships, particularly in heterogeneous learning environments. Social sensitivity among students is often reflected in prosocial attitudes and behaviors, such as willingness to help, respect for differences, and responsiveness to others' emotional states. Sensitive students are more likely to adjust their communication styles and behaviors to ensure comfort and mutual respect.

2.2.2. Empathy, Social Sensitivity, And Social Acceptance

Empathy and social sensitivity are interrelated interpersonal competencies that jointly contribute to social acceptance. Empathy provides the emotional foundation for understanding others' experiences, while social sensitivity guides the behavioral expression of that understanding in social interactions. Together, these competencies help reduce stereotypes, minimize social awkwardness, and promote inclusive relationships. Previous studies suggest that when empathy and social sensitivity coexist, individuals are more likely to perceive peers with disabilities as equal members of the social community. Empathy encourages openness and reduces prejudicial attitudes, whereas social sensitivity ensures that empathetic understanding is translated into appropriate and respectful behavior. Consequently, the integration of empathy and social sensitivity strengthens social acceptance and supports the creation of inclusive campus environments.

3. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design using a survey method. The participants consisted of 81 students enrolled in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Education Program at Universitas Pelita Bangsa. Data were collected using structured questionnaires designed to measure empathy, social sensitivity, and social acceptance toward peers with disabilities. All items were rated on a Likert scale. Data analysis was conducted using multiple linear regression to examine both partial and simultaneous effects of empathy and social sensitivity on social acceptance.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis was conducted using multiple linear regression to examine the influence of empathy and social sensitivity on the acceptance of peers with disabilities among BKPI students. A summary of the regression analysis results is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Independent Variabel	Coefficient	T-Value	Sig
Empaty	0.412	4.328	0.000
Social Sensitivity	0.387	3.965	0.000
R square	0.664		

The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.664 indicates that empathy and social sensitivity jointly explain 66.4% of the variance in the acceptance of peers with disabilities, while the remaining 33.6% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study. Partially, empathy demonstrates a positive and significant effect on social acceptance. This finding suggests that students who possess higher levels of empathy are more likely to exhibit open, respectful, and nondiscriminatory attitudes toward peers with disabilities. This result aligns with Davis's (1983) assertion that empathy underlies prosocial behavior and positive interpersonal relationships. Social sensitivity also shows a positive and significant influence on acceptance. Students with strong social sensitivity are better able to interpret social cues, adjust their behavior, and engage in interactions that respect the comfort and dignity of peers with disabilities. These findings support Baron and Byrne's (2005) perspective that social sensitivity enhances social competence and reduces interpersonal misunderstanding. Overall, the findings indicate that empathy and social sensitivity function complementarily in fostering inclusive social acceptance. Empathy provides emotional awareness, while social sensitivity facilitates appropriate behavioral responses, resulting in more natural and inclusive social interactions within the campus environment.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that empathy and social sensitivity significantly influence the acceptance of peers with disabilities among students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Education Program at Universitas Pelita Bangsa. Empathy plays a crucial role in enabling students to understand and share the emotional experiences of peers with disabilities, thereby reducing prejudice and fostering positive social interactions. Social sensitivity further supports this process by guiding students in responding appropriately to social cues and maintaining respectful interactions. The findings highlight the importance of integrating empathy and social sensitivity development into counselor education programs. Strengthening these competencies may contribute to the creation of inclusive, supportive, and diversity-respecting campus environments, particularly for students with disabilities.

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