



RESPONSIVE EVALUATION OF INCLUSIVE ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze how religious education for children with disabilities is implemented in Islamic educational institutions to support students' spiritual development, using Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model. Even with the advancement of inclusive education worldwide, religious education of learners with disabilities is still lacking, especially when it comes to adaptive pedagogy and contextual teaching practices. The existing religious education practices for learners with disabilities, which do not sufficiently cater to the participants' unique learning needs, are also restricted to a traditional pedagogy framework and, as a result, are less engaging and decontextualized in their spiritual growth. The researcher conducted a qualitative case study comprising interviews, participant-observations, and document reviews. Data analysis was done using an interactive model, which was evaluated using the Responsive Evaluation framework analytical focus on antecedents, transactions, and outcomes. The study revealed that an integrative model of inclusive religious education was formulated due to the combination of accessible learning spaces and adaptive pedagogy. The adaptive pedagogical interactions acted as a means to increase learners' engagement and understanding via the use of simple language, frequent repetition, and multi-dimensional teaching methods. The learners' spirituality was positively impacted by the use of experiential and situational teaching methods that helped them grasp and retain important religious lessons. The study's findings have contributed to the field of Islamic education by offering an accessible and holistic framework that encompasses the spatial, pedagogical, and experiential components.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious education has a fundamental role in shaping the spiritual, moral, and religious identity awareness of students, including for children with disabilities. Normatively, Islamic educational institutions are expected to be able to provide religious education services that are inclusive, adaptive, and responsive to the special needs of students, so that every child has an equal opportunity to get to know the values of divinity, worship, and morals (Mahfud et al., 2023; Munawar et al., 2023; Nuriyah, 2024). Real-life teaching is not only a component of religious education but also a unique aspect. The concept of religious education can help foster the understanding of religious values. However, inclusive education, which focuses on religious concepts, continues to be discussed globally (Abiddin et al., 2024; Hasanah et al., 2024; Kesson, 2021), but the concept of religious education still lacks attention for people with disabilities. When it comes to the concept of religious education (especially Islamic religious education), the system has not yet been fully implemented for all groups with disabilities. It often misses the mark when it comes to supporting students with different cognitive, sensory, or developmental needs. Consequently, many children with special needs face barriers in accessing meaningful religious learning.

Inclusive education requires an adaptive pedagogical approach responsive to students' diverse characteristics (Munna & Kalam, 2021; Rad et al., 2022; Widiastuti, 2025). Many children with disabilities benefit from flexible curricula, multisensory learning strategies, and experiential learning approaches that make abstract concepts more concrete and accessible (Maphie, 2025; Snyman et al., 2023; Sutejo et al., 2021). Improving students' understanding of complex concepts, including religious teachings, can be facilitated through visual aids and contextual learning. Inclusive pedagogy has been identified as a key factor in the success of inclusive education in teacher competency, as it allows educators to design and implement learning strategies tailored to individual needs. (Al-Dababneh & Al-Zboon, 2022; Tawa et al., 2024). Another important role is through institutional support, including easily accessible facilities and inclusive policies in fostering a supportive learning environment.

Some contributions have been made to research on Islamic education, but most research on Islamic education is very general; little to no research is focused on Islamic teaching pedagogy; little to no research is pedagogy of teaching strategies of children with disabilities. How are educational strategies designed, taught, and assessed in an educational institute is not a pedagogical research question. How do the pedagogy, learning environment, and outcomes of students' experiences with religion, participate in the formation of the students' religious experience? These questions represent an insufficient understanding of the components and systems in which inclusive religious education is assessed and how to best address the specific needs of children with disabilities.

Research on pedagogical restructuring of religious education lacks an evaluation framework, leading to a lack of understanding of how religious education functions and is applicable in educational systems. Education research

needs to be evaluative. Hence the purpose of this research in education is to evaluate inclusive religious education operationalized through the Responsive Evaluation Model by Stake. Specifically, this research focuses on how spiritually supporting Islamic education for children with disabilities is implemented in Islamic educational institutions (Stake, 2011).

Obscured by fragmented analyses regarding teaching strategies or frameworks of learning outcomes, the understanding of religious education for children with disabilities remains incomplete. Emphasis should be placed on the components of the system; the learning environment, the teaching dimensions, the spiritual dimensions of the children. Forgoing a diverse range of learning needs, religious education for children with disabilities remains unindividualized, and therefore, children are unable to appreciate the full breadth of religious concepts. This study incorporates the Responsive Evaluation Model to the field of religious education for children with disabilities to offer new insights on the educational context, teaching dimensions, and learning outcomes.

RESEARCH METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study focuses on the implementation of religious education for students with disabilities at the Muhammadiyah Special School (SLBM) Surya Gemilang, serving as the primary material object. Integrating Islamic religious instruction with special education services for children with various disabilities was the rationale behind the institution's selection as a unique educational environment. Educational phenomena can be understood contextually, in-depth, and comprehensively through a qualitative approach, particularly when examining the subjective experiences of educational practitioners directly involved in the religious education process for children with disabilities. Therefore, a qualitative approach was chosen in this study. (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Meanwhile, the case study design is used because this study focuses on one specific educational institution context that has unique characteristics in organizing religious education for students with special needs.

The people in this study are those who are hands-on with religious education at SLBM Surya Gemilang. Researchers didn't just pick folks at random – they used purposive sampling to select participants who really know the subject (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). Four teachers, a foundation caretaker, and three parents of students with disabilities formed the eight informants in this study. The main role in designing, implementing and supervising religious education programs at this institution makes teachers and caregivers categorized as key informants. Additional insights into students' spiritual development outside of school were provided by parents who were involved as additional informants. Participants' active engagement, willingness to share experiences, and ability to provide rich and reflective insights were highlighted (Chand, 2025). This provides a comprehensive picture of how religious education is experienced, interpreted, and evaluated through the involvement of various stakeholders.

In this study, three main techniques for data collection were applied: unstructured in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and analysis of

documents. In-depth interviews were conducted in two rounds with each informant, totaling nearly 200 minutes. Each round was 20–30 minutes for each informant, allowing room for each of them to go deep enough to capture their experiences and perspectives. To help interview participants best express themselves, interviews in this study were conducted in informants' native Javanese and Indonesian. After interview recordings were transcribed data were translated into English unedited. The researcher participatory observed by engaging in activities described in the religious activities, such as teaching, communal praying, and spiritual coaching. Relevant documents like syllabus, teaching guides, and spiritual activity registers were also analyzed. The roles and genders of the participants in Table 1 reflect the efforts made to ensure a broad and rich data set.

Table 1. Informant Profiles

No.	Initials	Remarks	Gender	Informant Status
1	GD1	Teacher	Male	Key Informants
2	GD2	Teacher	Women	Key Informants
3	GD3	Teacher	Women	Key Informants
4	GD4	Teacher	Women	Key Informants
5	PD1	Caregiver	Male	Key Informants
6	OD2	Parents	Male	Additional Informants
7	OD3	Parents	Women	Additional Informants
8	OD4	Parents	Women	Additional Informants

Data credibility was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods. Comparing multiple sources of information identified from different perspectives constitutes triangulation, as well as cross-checking the collected data to minimize potential bias and increase reliability. An interactive analysis model, developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Miles et al., 2014), was used for data analysis. The model consists of three interrelated stages: data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. In data condensation, relevant information is selected, simplified, and organized. In data presentation, findings are presented in the form of a thematic matrix and narrative to facilitate interpretation. Findings are continuously interpreted and validated through iterative comparison with evidence to draw conclusions. Credible and meaningful conclusions result from all processes within a systematic framework.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Integrative Model of Inclusive Religious Education

The school creates a friendly environment and teachers adapt their teaching methods to the integrative model for inclusive religious education to be realized. It's not enough to simply change the curriculum for children with disabilities – accessible facilities and teaching that is responsive to each student's needs are needed. Prayer and religious activities, child-friendly classrooms, and visual aids are available at schools to support learning activities. Teachers use flexible methods that suit each student's cognitive and emotional needs, making even complex religious ideas easier to understand. When all these elements come

together, children can truly participate in religious learning—not just sitting in class, but engaging and connected. Real access and opportunities to truly engage in religious education as a learning model for children with disabilities are essential for experiencing it.

In the learning process, activities such as getting to know God's attributes, understanding the creation story of nature, and habituating prayer are carried out repeatedly and contextually. One teacher explained that visual facilities are very helpful in explaining abstract concepts to students, as GD1 revealed: "Children understand more easily when we use pictures and story cards because they can see directly what is being explained." A similar opinion was expressed by GD3 who stated, "When we use the medium of images about nature and God's creation, they respond more quickly and start asking questions about what they see." In terms of parenting in the school environment, PD1 also emphasized the importance of a concrete approach in religious learning by stating, "If learning is done with stories and pictures, children are calmer and more focused on participating in activities." The parents' perspective also shows the same thing, as OD2 says, "My child often tells me about the pictures that teachers use when learning about God." Meanwhile, OD3 added, "He started to get to know simple prayers because they were often repeated in class." Even OD4 mentions that changes in children's religious behavior are starting to be seen in everyday life, as he revealed, "Now my son is starting to imitate the prayer before eating as taught in school." The data shows that the existence of inclusive learning facilities serves as an important foundation in building a more meaningful religious learning experience for students with disabilities.

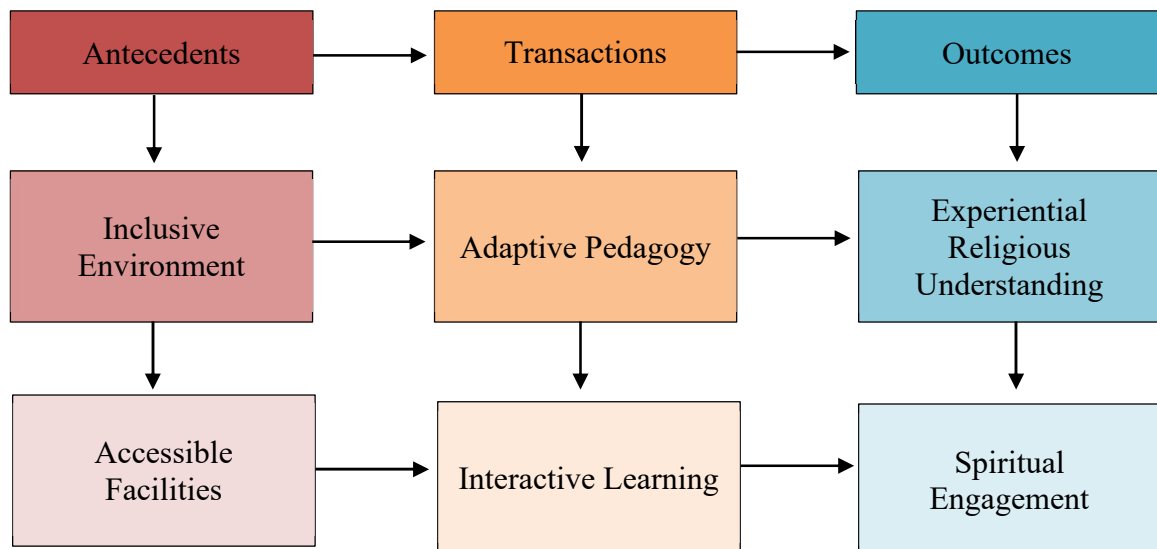


Figure 1. The Integrative Model Identified

The interaction between adaptive pedagogical processes (transactions)—such as the use of simple language, repetition, and multisensory strategies—and the initial learning conditions (antecedents), such as accessible infrastructure and a supportive environment, is shown in Figure 1. Active student participation and

developing spiritual understanding are fostered through interactions that ultimately lead to meaningful learning outcomes. The ongoing cycle of inclusive learning is strengthened by the continuity between these components.

The ongoing interaction between various elements contributes to the effective impact of inclusive religious education. The antecedent dimension provides the basic conditions necessary for learning, while the transactional dimension represents the active pedagogical processes that facilitate understanding. Students' religious engagement and spiritual development are influenced by the outcomes of these interactions, as are concepts. The Stake Model emphasizes that the complexity of inclusive education practices is reflected through an integrated structure. Inclusive religious education should not be viewed as separate components, but as a complex whole—an argument increasingly supported by researchers.

The success of inclusive Islamic religious education is supported by synergy between pedagogical and structural aspects. Easy access for everyone to meet their learning needs is based on classroom settings and effective governance, resulting from integration. The goal of inclusive religious education is more clearly illustrated by the system the institution builds through pedagogical synergy.

Adaptive Pedagogical Interaction as a Mediating Mechanism

Curriculum design, along with available resources and facilities, alone are not sufficient to determine the effectiveness of inclusive religious education. Teacher-student communication during the learning process, in particular, is crucial to teaching strategies in religious education. Such communication involves the use of simplified language, repetition, visual aids, and engaging teaching methods so that religious ideas can be processed and assimilated by students. Crucially, teaching strategies that utilize adaptive communication must be characterized by teacher empathy and patience, as well as ethical and individualized concern for assisting students in the learning process. Simplifying the delivery with more meaningful meaning allows for effective delivery of religious teachings within the framework. The role of pedagogical interaction in bridging learning conditions and learning outcomes is further explored within the framework for inclusive religious education.

Table 2. The Categorization of Adaptive Pedagogical Interaction

Pedagogical Strategy	Description	Student Response	Mediating Function
Simplified Language	Use of basic and clear sentences	Improved comprehension	Reduces cognitive complexity
Repetition	Repeated practice of prayers	Better retention	Reinforces memory
Visual Media	Use of images and story cards	Increased attention	Enhances conceptual clarity
Kinesthetic Learning	Learning through movement	Active participation	Bridges abstract concepts

Students' understanding of abstract and religious ideas, as well as their ability to overcome learning difficulties, can be facilitated through the use of pedagogical strategies, as shown in Table 2. Religious ideas or teachings can be simplified by teachers through adaptive communication strategies, so that students' understanding is easier to achieve. The delivery of religious teachings can be done using various learning media, such as visual aids and concrete representations of the ideas. Student learning is facilitated not by a single method, but by a combination of several epic learning methods that form a flexible interaction pedagogy.

The educational model of Surya Gemilang SLBM demonstrates that learning success is determined not only by teaching methods, but also by the synergy between inclusive facilities, adaptive pedagogical approaches, and the involvement of various parties in the educational process. A supportive school environment allows learners to learn religion through a fun experience and not create undue academic pressure. Teachers, caregivers, and parents have complementary roles in building children's religious experiences. GD1 emphasized that collaboration is essential in the learning process, stating, "We always try to communicate with parents about their child's development." This opinion is reinforced by GD3 who said, "Learning will be more effective if parents also make prayer habitable at home." In terms of parenting in schools, PD1 states, "We help teachers ensure that children continue to participate in religious activities outside of school hours." The family's perspective also shows support for the process. OD2 states, "We are trying to continue the habit of prayer taught in schools." The same thing was conveyed by OD3 who said, "We feel helped because the school teaches children about the value of religion." In fact, OD4 considers that religious education in schools has a positive impact on children's character development, as he expressed, "My child becomes calmer and easier to direct." These findings suggest that the integration between the school and family environment is an important factor in building an inclusive and sustainable religious education experience for children with disabilities.

The significance of adaptive interaction emphasizes interaction's role within an inclusive pedagogical framework. Constructivist learning theories integrate social and experiential dimensions of knowledge and cognitive understanding, knowledge, and understanding. Interaction becomes even more important as it shapes emotional and spiritual dimensions as well. Teachers' flexibility and coping capacity regarding their work communication and instructional methods is important for learning to occur. Consequently, adaptive pedagogical interaction may be regarded as a principal competency in inclusive education. This adaptive pedagogical interaction insight underscores interaction-responsive pedagogical frameworks in inclusive pedagogy, thus expanding the pedagogical discourse and engaging the pedagogical frameworks to accommodate diverse students' needs.

Experiential Spiritual Development through Contextual Learning

Learning activities involving direct experience are more positively responded to by students, according to observations. In outdoor learning sessions,

they interact with natural objects such as plants and animals while discussing their meaning as God's creations. Outdoor activities focus students' attention and increase their enthusiasm for learning. This can gradually increase their confidence in carrying out religious activities independently. Students' ability to internalize religious practices is achieved through repeated practice and participation in daily routines. The habit of practicing and following daily routines helps them experience religious practices more deeply.

An epic learning environment will be created and made more meaningful with an experience-based approach. Memorization methods are no longer aesthetically pleasing, and listening becomes boring. This must be replaced by learning religious values through involvement in real-life experiences. Routine religious activities are ingrained in students with disabilities through daily practices, fostering religious understanding. Learning becomes more relevant and impactful, providing a more engaging and experiential internalization of religious values.

Table 3. The Learning Experience

Learning Experience	Activity Type	Observed Outcome	Spiritual Meaning
Observing nature	Outdoor learning	Recognition of creation	Understanding of God's power
Prayer practice	Repetition & simulation	Ability to perform prayer	Embodied religious practice
Daily routines	Habitual activities	Increased participation	Internalization of values

Table 3 shows how various forms of learning experiences contribute to students' spiritual development. When children observe nature as a model, they learn to recognize God's greatness through tangible, visible examples. The practice of prayer provides a means for them to embody religious teachings through physical movement. Religious practices are incorporated into daily life, reinforcing daily experiences and routines. The growth of meaningful spirituality is emphasized through the importance of contextual learning.

Students with disabilities should be treated with a new perspective on how to cultivate spirituality. Real-life experiences that touch emotions and real-life social relationships are essential. Faith growth does not arise from abstract explanations alone. Direct experiential learning, which evokes traditional models of religious education that emphasize memorization and cognitive understanding, can be directly felt by students with disabilities.

Their spiritual connection becomes more personal and profound when students are actively involved in activities that relate to their daily lives. Therefore, educators need to pay more attention to experiential approaches and real-world contexts when designing inclusive religious education programs. Experiencing and living it in daily activities is the impact. In this way, religious teachings are not only understood as theory.

Discussion

An integrative model in inclusive religious education has a real impact on improving the learning effectiveness of children with disabilities. This concept is not simply about opening access, but also about aligning an inclusive environment with adaptive teaching methods, ensuring meaningful engagement. Student engagement in learning materials as a space for exploration is more important. Thus, inclusivity is not sufficient simply to provide physical access. Inclusive education will only be effective if environmental adjustments go hand in hand with appropriate pedagogical strategies, because access alone does not guarantee deep learning connections (Johansson et al., 2023; Maenner et al., 2023). The direct spiritual experience experienced by students through the integration of these two aspects allows students not only to understand cognitively.

The effectiveness of this model can be understood through the close relationship between environmental readiness and teaching responses. Mutual support from both aspects can form a holistic learning system. Accessible facilities help reduce physical and sensory barriers, while adaptive teaching methods address students' cognitive and emotional needs (Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022; Cámara et al., 2021; Hazan & Somech, 2023). Learning outcomes arise from the complementary interaction between components, not from standalone factors (Diamond & Bulfin, 2025; Mardhiah et al., 2021; Nawas et al., 2025). A separate learning approach—separating infrastructure from pedagogy—often does not produce optimal results. Conversely, continuous support provided across various dimensions of learning as an integrated system. These findings emphasize that such integration is crucial in religious education, as abstract concepts require contextual bridges to be more deeply understood and internalized.

Student learning outcomes and learning design are linked through the crucial role of adaptive pedagogical interactions. The success of inclusive religious education is determined not only by the material taught, but also by the delivery method and the experiences created through interactions (Salabi, 2023; Umuhoza & Hakizimana, 2024). Student engagement can be enhanced through adaptive interactions. Complex religious concepts can be more easily understood through teacher simplification. Participation and learning achievement are strongly influenced by the quality of interactions and teacher responsiveness (Adiyono et al., 2022; Lambirth et al., 2021; Nazaretsky et al., 2022). Static teaching materials are transformed into dynamic learning experiences thanks to the driving role of adaptive interactions.

Relational and cognitive frameworks underpin the mediating role of adaptive interactions. Students' cognitive development is supported while their engagement is maintained through adaptive interactions. Connecting students' existing knowledge with abstract concepts can be done through repetition, simple language, and movement activities. Students' diverse needs can be met through structured and tailored learning (Blyznyuk & Kachak, 2024; Dumont et al., 2025; Rawashdeh et al., 2021). Empathy and personal attention are relational dimensions in the development of self-confidence and motivation. In religious

education, where concepts are often abstract, this type of mediation becomes even more crucial for truly meaningful learning.

The spirituality of children can be nurtured through the development of experiential learning and real-world contexts within inclusive religious education. Traditional methods such as rote learning and the instruction of learning are often less effective for the education of children with disabilities. In contrast, direct contact with everyday situations provides opportunities for the religious experiences to be more easily grasped. Learning experiences that are related to and connected with real-world experiences are more meaningful (Alrehaili & Al Osman, 2022; Tembrevilla et al., 2024; Toquero, 2021). Direct experience observing nature and everyday activities is invaluable for students as a foundation for internalizing religious values. The emphasis on real-world situations and experiences reinforces the importance of context-oriented and child-centered religious education practices, particularly in inclusive settings.

Spiritual development related to cognitive components can be effectively enhanced through experiential learning. Students process visual, auditory, and kinesthetic information through learning involving various sensory modalities (Fatoni & Subando, 2024; Nurdin et al., 2024; Villalobos & Salazar, 2023). This learning method is particularly beneficial during the challenges faced by students with cognitive and developmental difficulties (Al-Dababneh & Al-Zboon, 2022; Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; Johansson et al., 2023). The deep long-term memory system stores and recalls spiritually and emotionally meaningful experiences. Spiritually and emotionally meaningful experiences tend to be stored in, and recalled from, deep long-term memory systems. This suggests that meaningful and effective emotional experiences underlie spiritual learning.

Learning environments that integrate accessibility with adaptive pedagogy need to be designed by educational institutions, as this research demonstrates, with an emphasis on teacher training in inclusive and interactive teaching strategies. The Responsive Evaluation framework is theoretically expanded by demonstrating how initiating factors, interaction processes, and outcomes are interconnected in the context of inclusive religious education. The spiritual learning process is reconceptualized as a relational and contextual experience, an implication emerging from the research. Educational policy and practice gain greater insight from these findings: inclusion cannot stop at providing physical structures alone. A holistic, interaction-centered approach is the direction that must be taken for inclusive education to be truly meaningful.

CONCLUSION

An integrative learning environment, adaptive pedagogical interactions, and experiential learning processes are most effective for teaching religious education to children with disabilities. Their spiritual development is best fostered not through teaching religious doctrine, but through experiential learning that is distinctly concrete, contextual and relational. Among the goals of inclusiveness are mediating meaningful learning and pedagogical engagement. Experiential learning is a primary pathway for the assimilation of religious values for children

with disabilities. This study has been confined to a single educational institution and has small number of participants who did not exemplify the full diversity of experiences that include geo-spatial, temporal, type of disability, age, and socio-cultural factors. Therefore, future studies are needed that focus on wider geographical areas, consider varying gender, age and disabilities, and employ mixed methods to yield more usable results for wider contexts.

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