

Challenges and Impacts of Implementing Islamic Religious Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the challenges and impacts of implementing Islamic Religious Education (IRE) for students with intellectual disabilities at Muhammadiyah Special School (SLB) Palu. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The participants consisted of the school principal, IRE teachers, and parents of students. The findings reveal several challenges in the implementation of IRE, including limited learning media, variations in students' intellectual abilities, and a lack of consistent parental support at home. Nevertheless, IRE has shown positive impacts, such as improving students' understanding of basic Islamic teachings, fostering worship practices like prayer and daily supplications, and developing moral behavior such as respecting teachers and helping peers. These findings suggest that despite its obstacles, IRE contributes significantly to shaping the character and Islamic identity of students with intellectual disabilities in special schools.

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental right for every individual, including children with special needs. In the context of Islamic education, students with intellectual disabilities also deserve proper guidance to recognize, understand, and practice Islamic teachings according to their abilities. This principle is in line with Indonesia's National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, which emphasizes that education must be provided democratically, fairly, and without discrimination, while upholding human rights.

Students with intellectual disabilities experience limitations in intellectual functioning, adaptive behavior, and social skills. These conditions require adjustments in the learning process, particularly in Islamic Religious Education (IRE). IRE does not only serve as a transfer of knowledge but also as a means to shape students' character, faith, and Islamic identity. Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in adapting strategies that meet students' cognitive needs.

In practice, the implementation of IRE for students with intellectual disabilities faces various challenges. Teachers must adjust methods, strategies, and media to accommodate diverse intellectual levels. Moreover, the lack of teaching aids, minimal parental involvement, and limited training for teachers are obstacles that hinder the learning process.

Despite these challenges, IRE provides meaningful impacts. Previous studies have shown that Islamic education enhances worship practices, instills discipline, and strengthens students' moral values. This indicates that Islamic education has an essential role in supporting the spiritual and social development of children with special needs.

Based on this background, this study focuses on two objectives: (1) to identify the challenges teachers face in implementing IRE for students with intellectual disabilities, and (2) to analyze the impacts of IRE on students' understanding, worship, and

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moral behavior. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of inclusive Islamic education practices in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Inclusive Islamic Education

Inclusive education emphasizes the right of every child, including those with special needs, to receive equal learning opportunities without discrimination. In Islamic teachings, this principle aligns with the values of *'adl* (justice) and *rahmah* (compassion), which affirm that all humans have equal dignity before Allah. Abdullah (2019) explains that Islamic inclusive education ensures that children with disabilities are provided access to religious learning tailored to their capacities. Ratnawati (2022) further highlights that practical and simplified Islamic teaching methods can significantly enhance the religious awareness of students with special needs.

2.2 Teaching Strategies for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Teachers play a pivotal role in implementing Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in special schools. Demonstration, repetition, and hands-on practice are among the most effective methods for intellectually disabled students. According to Piaget's theory (1972), children with limited abstract thinking abilities learn best through concrete experiences. Subini (2016) found that the use of visual aids, real objects, and consistent practice contributes significantly to improving the learning outcomes of intellectually disabled students.

2.3 Previous Studies

Several recent studies have examined the implementation of IRE for special needs students. Wardhani and Khadavi (2025) reported that habit-based IRE learning helped form students' religious character through daily worship and moral practice in special schools. Similarly, Indriyani (2022) emphasized that the internalization of Islamic values for children with special needs can be achieved through simple, consistent, and contextual approaches. These findings confirm that despite various obstacles, IRE remains impactful in strengthening the spiritual and moral development of students with intellectual disabilities.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore *the challenges and impacts of implementing Islamic Religious Education for students with intellectual disabilities at SLB Muhammadiyah Palu*. The research was conducted at SLB Muhammadiyah Palu, located on Jln. Tompi No. 15, Palu City, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia.

The participants included the school principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and parents of students with intellectual disabilities. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure validity, triangulation of sources, techniques, and time was applied.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are organized into two main themes: (1) challenges in implementing Islamic Religious Education (IRE) for students with intellectual disabilities, and (2) the impacts of IRE on students' understanding, worship, and moral behavior.

4.1 Challenges in Implementing IRE

The first challenge relates to limited learning media. Teachers explained that most of the media used were simple, such as pictures and real objects, due to the school's limited resources. This condition sometimes restricted the creativity of teachers in delivering material.

Second, the variation in intellectual abilities among students posed significant difficulties. Some students were able to recognize Arabic letters or memorize short surahs, while others struggled with basic instructions. This forced teachers to apply individualized approaches, which required more time and patience.

Third, the lack of parental involvement was another challenge. While some parents actively encouraged their children to practice worship at home, others did not provide consistent support. This inconsistency hindered students' progress in practicing religious activities outside of school.

4.2 Impacts of IRE on Students

Despite the challenges, IRE has brought several positive impacts.

- Improved understanding: Students became more familiar with basic Islamic teachings, such as recognizing Allah, Prophet Muhammad, and daily prayers.
- Better worship practices: Through repetition and direct guidance, students were able to practice prayer movements and simple supplications more consistently.
- Moral development: Teachers and parents observed positive changes, such as students showing respect to teachers, greeting peers, and helping each other in simple ways.

These findings align with previous research by Wardhani & Khadavi (2025), who emphasized that habit-based religious learning fosters students' character and religious identity. Similarly, Subini (2016) highlighted the importance of repetitive and concrete learning methods for intellectually disabled students. Thus, the study confirms that although IRE implementation faces structural and pedagogical obstacles, it still significantly contributes to shaping students' religious and moral development.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) for students with intellectual disabilities in special schools encounters various challenges but also produces significant positive impacts. The main challenges identified include limited learning media, diverse intellectual abilities among students, and the lack of consistent parental involvement at home. These obstacles require teachers to apply individualized strategies and demonstrate high levels of patience and creativity.

On the other hand, the implementation of IRE contributes positively to students' religious and moral development. It improves their understanding of basic Islamic teachings, strengthens their ability to practice prayer and supplications, and fosters moral values such as respect, discipline, and cooperation.

Therefore, Islamic Religious Education remains an essential element in supporting the spiritual and character development of students with intellectual disabilities. Future efforts should focus on providing better learning resources, enhancing teacher training, and strengthening collaboration between schools and parents to maximize the effectiveness of IRE for students with special needs.

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