

Inclusive Islamic Education for Students with Special Needs: Child-Friendly and Adaptable Design Approaches for Accessibility

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research examines the design of child-friendly and inclusive Islamic religious education (PAI) to improve accessibility and teaching approaches for students with special needs. Through systematic literature review methodology, the study identifies key principles of universal design for learning that can be adapted to PAI instruction, emphasizing multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement. Findings reveal that effective inclusive PAI design requires comprehensive accessibility in physical environment, learning materials, and pedagogical methods. Specific strategies for different disability types are discussed, including visual and tactile approaches for blind students, sign language and visualization for deaf students, structured concrete instruction for intellectual disabilities, and individualized sensory-sensitive approaches for autism spectrum conditions. The study highlights the importance of assistive technology, authentic assessment, teacher professional development, parental involvement, and collaborative support systems. Results indicate that inclusive PAI design is feasible and beneficial for all students, not only for those with special needs. The research provides theoretical foundations and practical guidance for developing inclusive religious education that respects diversity and ensures equitable access to spiritual development for every child.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia holds the noble objective of shaping students who possess faith, piety, and noble morals. In practice, however, the PAI learning system remains dominated by a classical approach that assumes all students possess identical abilities and learning styles (Pratama et al., 2025). PAI teachers frequently deliver material using lecture and question-and-answer methods that rely heavily on students' verbal and auditory capabilities. The alignment of teacher teaching styles and environmental support constitutes a key factor driving students' learning interest and engagement in school (Safitri & Darmawan, 2023). This conventional approach functions well for typical students, yet poses a serious obstacle for children with special needs (ABK) who require distinct accommodations. Disparities in educational access continue to serve as a fundamental challenge hindering the realization of equitable learning service delivery for every student group (Rojak &

Khayru, 2022). Students with special needs such as autism spectrum disorders, intellectual disabilities, or hearing impairments frequently fail to follow the general learning trajectory, thereby losing the opportunity to acquire equal religious education. Schools have not fully realized that every child is entitled to meaningful religious education suited to their needs (Aprilia et al., 2025). Awareness concerning educational rights for children with special needs is indeed beginning to grow, but its implementation in the field remains far from expectations.

Child-friendly and inclusive learning designs are an absolute necessity within an educational system that values the diversity of student abilities. The concept of child-friendliness in education refers to the creation of a learning environment that is safe, comfortable, and enjoyable for all children without exception (Muminov, 2025). The establishment of an inclusive school climate is vital in supporting students' socio-emotional development and

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character during interactions within the learning environment (Gani, 2025). Meanwhile, inclusiveness emphasizes the acceptance of differences as an asset rather than a weakness that must be concealed. The presence of social prejudices and stereotypes within society frequently acts as a barrier to establishing fair and inclusive interactions for vulnerable groups (Sajjapong et al., 2022). Child-friendly and inclusive means that every child can access subject matter, participate in religious activities, and demonstrate learning achievements according to their respective capacities. PAI teachers are challenged to design adaptive learning processes capable of accommodating diverse student conditions. The strengthening of social education and inclusive civic values is oriented toward active participation and the broad social progress of society (Warin, 2022; Hariani & Mardikaningsih, 2022). The utilization of the universal design for learning (UDL) approach in PAI lesson planning can serve as a solution to ensure all students obtain equal access to religious content (Ofiani et al., 2025). PAI learning designs are no longer rigid and exclusive, but rather open and adaptive to the needs of every individual.

Children with special needs face a dual challenge: barriers arising from their disability conditions and challenges from learning systems that have not been designed flexibly. Special needs students with visual impairments require learning materials in audio or braille formats to access religious texts such as the Quran and Hadith (Aziz et al., 2025). Special needs students with hearing impairments need visualization and sign language to understand teacher explanations regarding the pillars of faith and the pillars of Islam. Special needs students with intellectual disabilities require material simplification and intensive repetition so that abstract concepts about divinity and the afterlife can be understood gradually. Special needs students with autism spectrum disorders require clear learning structures, consistent routines, and visual approaches to reduce their anxiety. Each type of special needs student possesses unique characteristics, meaning that a teaching strategy effective for one type of special needs student is not necessarily suitable for another (Rosadi et al., 2024). PAI teachers need to possess adequate knowledge and skills regarding the characteristics of each disability type, alongside the ability to adjust their teaching approaches according to students' specific needs. The absence of this knowledge leads teachers to tend to use the same approach for all students, which ultimately disadvantages special needs students.

Accessibility in PAI education for children with special needs encompasses various dimensions,

ranging from physical access to facilities and infrastructure to access tailored curriculum content. Physical access means that classrooms, places of worship, and school facilities can be reached and utilized by special needs students safely (Amrullah, 2025). Conducive school environmental facility support and full attention from parents are proven to play a direct role in building student independence and learning achievement (Haqiqi & Darmawan, 2023; Umroh & Darmawan, 2024). Schools need to provide ramps, handrails, and disability-friendly facilities to facilitate the mobility of special needs students. Access to curriculum content means that PAI materials must be available in various formats accessible to special needs students with sensory or cognitive impairments. PAI textbooks need to be provided in braille or audio versions for visually impaired students, while visual materials need to be equipped with texts and narrations for hearing-impaired students. The utilization of interactive learning media and accessible digital literacy is proven to significantly broaden the reach of understanding and academic achievement among students (Rizal & Darmawan, 2024). Access to the learning process means that special needs students can participate actively in discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and group activities with appropriate support. Awareness of these accessibility rights is also closely related to increasing legal awareness and social responsibility within the educational environment (Rojak, 2021). The accessibility gaps occurring at present indicate that PAI learning designs have yet to fully implement the principles of inclusiveness.

PAI teaching strategies for children with special needs require a student-centered approach and are grounded in the principles of differentiated learning (Emery et al., 2025). Content differentiation is executed by presenting materials in varied formats matching student learning styles. Process differentiation means teachers utilize various adaptive learning methods and media. The application of varied assignment methods and the stimulation of social interactions inside the classroom are proven capable of boosting student learning activity and participation (Rahmawati & Darmawan, 2024). Product differentiation provides options for students to demonstrate their understanding according to their best potential, whether through visual works, oral presentations, or worship practices. In measuring the development of spiritual and social attitudes in special needs students, the value-based assessment approach provides evaluation instruments that are objective,

fair, and friendly toward child diversity (An Nafisah et al., 2024). PAI teachers need to develop skills in utilizing learning aids and assistive technology to support the learning process of special needs students (Furqon & Haryanti, 2024). The use of digital platforms and modern information media now increasingly facilitates the dissemination and provision of inclusive educational materials for the wider community (Darmawan & Fajar, 2024). Training regarding differentiated learning and the use of assistive tools must become a primary priority in the professional development of PAI teachers.

The evaluation system in inclusive Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning must also be designed by considering the diversity of student abilities without applying identical standards to everyone. Children with special needs (ABK) are frequently assessed using the same criteria as regular students, without accounting for the barriers they face in accessing materials or demonstrating understanding. Consequently, the evaluation results of special needs students consistently appear low and fail to reflect their true capabilities (Mal'tseva, 2025). Assessment for special needs students needs modification in terms of format, time, and grading criteria, aligning with their respective conditions and needs. PAI teachers need to develop flexible assessment instruments usable for various types of special needs students, such as providing answer choices in picture formats or granting additional time to complete tasks. Alternative assessments like portfolios, behavioral observations, and project-based evaluations can be utilized to gauge special needs students' learning achievements more fairly and accurately. Schools need to establish policies regarding inclusive assessment that provide clear guidelines for teachers on how to adjust evaluations for special needs students. Parents also need to be involved in the evaluation process to provide information regarding children's development at home, which can complement school-based assessments. PAI learning evaluation thus becomes fairer and more meaningful for all students, including those with special needs.

The problems emerging in the implementation of child-friendly and inclusive PAI learning design involve a lack of understanding and competence among PAI teachers regarding inclusive education and the characteristics of special needs students. The majority of PAI teachers fail to receive adequate training on how to teach special needs students during their education in higher education institutions. The curricula of Islamic religious education study programs focus heavily on religious content and

classical teaching methods, whereas discussions concerning inclusive education are frequently delivered only in passing or omitted entirely. PAI teachers enter the profession with extremely limited knowledge regarding disability types, individual characteristics, and appropriate teaching strategies for each category of special needs student. Consequently, when confronted with special needs students in classrooms, they feel helpless and tend to ignore the specific needs of those students (Khairunnisa et al., 2024). Even teachers harboring good intentions often commit errors in treating special needs students due to ignorance, such as forcing special needs students to follow identical teaching methods as other students or issuing punishments when special needs students fail to follow instructions. Teachers similarly lack knowledge on utilizing learning aids or assistive technology capable of supporting special needs students' learning processes. The shortage of training concerning inclusive assessment leaves teachers struggling to measure special needs students' learning achievements fairly and objectively. This situation is compounded by a lack of resources and support from schools, leaving teachers without access to enhance their competencies through training or workshops.

Other issues serving as primary obstacles include the absence of facilities and infrastructure supporting the accessibility of children with special needs (ABK) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at schools. Schools in Indonesia, encompassing both public and private institutions, remain severely limited in providing physical facilities friendly to special needs students. School buildings frequently lack ramps, handrails, or toilets accessible to wheelchair users. PAI classrooms that are narrow and crowded with desks hinder special needs students' mobility and disrupt their comfort in learning. PAI learning media available in schools such as textbooks, illustrations, and teaching aids are not designed with accessibility principles, rendering them unusable by special needs students with sensory impairments. PAI textbooks in braille or audio formats are extremely rare, preventing visually impaired students from accessing lesson materials independently (Zahro & Nasikhin, 2023). Visual media utilized by teachers lack alternative texts or narrations for hearing-impaired students, causing them to miss important information conveyed through images or videos. Teaching aids used to explain worship concepts, such as prayer or ablution procedures, frequently fail to account for the needs of special needs students with physical or motor impairments. The absence of adequate facilities and infrastructure makes it difficult for special needs students to participate fully in PAI learning and access

the same subject matter as other students. Schools likewise fail to provide shadow teachers who can assist special needs students in following the classroom learning process. This resource shortage occurs due to educational budget allocations that remain extremely limited for inclusive education.

This study aims to formulate a child-friendly and inclusive Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning design that can be applied across various educational settings to meet the needs of children with special needs (ABK). The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the development of a conceptual framework regarding inclusive PAI education that integrates the principles of accessibility, differentiation, and fair assessment into learning design. Its practical contribution consists of providing a guide for PAI teachers in designing and implementing adaptive learning, as well as for schools in providing facilities and infrastructure supporting inclusion. This research will also identify various effective teaching strategies for various types of special needs students, complete with concrete examples that teachers can adapt according to their conditions and needs. PAI teachers will gain a better understanding of the characteristics of special needs students and how to adjust their approaches to accommodate students' ability differences. Schools will receive guidance on policies, budgeting, and human resource development required to support inclusive education. Parents of children with special needs will benefit as their children obtain a positive and meaningful learning experience at school. With the achievement of these objectives, PAI education will become more equitable, more inclusive, and more meaningful for all learners.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a literature study design, which according to Walliman (2021) is a systematic method for reviewing and evaluating the existing body of knowledge within a specific field of study. The selection of the literature study is based on the nature of the topic, which still requires conceptual exploration regarding inclusive Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning design before it can be empirically tested in the field. This approach enables researchers to identify, synthesize, and critique various theories, models, and findings previously generated by researchers in the fields of inclusive education and religious education. Through a literature study, researchers can build a solid theoretical foundation to develop recommendations concerning accessibility and PAI teaching strategies for children with special needs (ABK). The qualitative nature of this

research is reflected in the process of interpretation and text analysis conducted critically and reflectively toward arguments emerging within the literature. Researchers do not merely summarize or describe the content of the literature, but rather perform a conceptual synthesis that yields new and deeper understanding regarding the topic examined. Consequently, this literature study functions not as a repetition of existing knowledge, but rather as a more organized and applicable reconstruction of knowledge.

The research procedure refers to the qualitative research guidelines systematized by Patten (2016), which encompass the identification of research problems, the search for and collection of literature sources, the evaluation of source quality, and thematic analysis of the collected information. The literature search was conducted through leading academic databases using relevant keywords such as inclusive learning design, Islamic religious education for children with special needs, and accessibility in PAI learning. Inclusion criteria covered literature published within the last decade, possessing recognized credibility, and discussing substantively inclusive education within religious subjects or spiritual values. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, wherein researchers identified main themes emerging from the literature and organized them into a coherent and comprehensive framework. The validity of findings was enhanced through source triangulation by comparing arguments from various different authors to ensure that the conclusions drawn were not based on a single perspective alone. Researchers also maintained an audit trail by documenting every step of the research process in detail, enabling readers to trace back how final conclusions were reached. With this systematic and planned procedure, this research is expected to yield credible analysis beneficial for the development of inclusive PAI learning design.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The design of child-friendly and inclusive Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning begins with a proper understanding of the principles of universal design for learning, which serve as the foundation for adaptive lesson planning (Kapil et al., 2024). Universal design for learning provides three fundamental principles that must be fulfilled in every learning design: presenting information in multiple ways, providing diverse opportunities for students to express their understanding, and developing various ways to maintain student engagement in learning. In its application to PAI, teachers must present material concerning tawhid,

worship, and morals in multimodal forms such as through read-aloud texts, demonstration videos, and hands-on activities involving physical movement and sensory experiences. Students with visual impairments will benefit from audio descriptions, while hearing-impaired students will be assisted by written text and images supporting verbal explanations. The application of these three principles requires careful planning and teacher creativity in developing various complementary media and learning activities. PAI teachers need to allocate time to design every meeting by paying attention to specific needs that may arise from students with various conditions (Aulia et al., 2025). This approach renders PAI learning more inclusive because every student, regardless of the barriers they possess, can access material through the channel best suited to their capabilities.

Accessibility in PAI learning for special needs students is not limited to the provision of material in accessible formats, but also encompasses the creation of a physical and social environment supporting full student participation in every activity. An accessible physical environment means that PAI classrooms must be reachable by all students, including those using wheelchairs or other mobility aids (Taylor et al., 2025). Flexible arrangement of desks and chairs enables teachers to approach individual students and provide personalized assistance when needed. An inclusive social environment means that all students, whether special needs or regular students, feel accepted and valued within the learning community. PAI teachers need to create a classroom climate that respects differences and encourages all students to help and cooperate with one another. Well-designed group learning activities can serve as a vehicle for regular students to become acquainted with and understand their special needs peers, as well as learn how to work alongside them. The presence of special needs students in PAI classrooms can actually serve as a valuable experience for all students to develop empathy, tolerance, and care for others. Consequently, PAI learning does not merely teach religious values theoretically, but also practices them in daily interactions among students.

PAI teaching strategies for children with special needs (ABK) with visual impairments require an emphasis on utilizing the senses of hearing and touch as substitutes for non-optimal vision. PAI teachers need to develop audio materials recording Quranic recitations, translations, and explanations of religious concepts

that students can replay repeatedly according to their needs (Aziz et al., 2025). Braille Qurans and braille PAI books must be available in the school library so that visually impaired students can access religious texts independently. Three-dimensional tactile teaching aids, such as Kaaba replicas or miniature mosques, can be utilized to explain the procedures of Hajj and Umrah concretely. Teachers must also employ descriptive language rich in sensory information when explaining phenomena or objects that visually impaired students cannot see. Demonstrations of worship practices, such as prayer or ablution procedures, must be conducted with physical guidance where teachers guide students' hands to feel every movement. Visually impaired students also need to be assigned tasks they can complete without relying on vision, such as listening to lecture recordings and making oral summaries. Assessment for visually impaired students must utilize accessible formats, such as oral interviews or audio recordings, rather than written tests relying on reading skills. With appropriate strategies, visually impaired students can achieve the same PAI learning objectives as other students, albeit through different pathways.

Special needs students with hearing impairments require a different approach, focusing on the utilization of visualization and sign language as the primary media in PAI learning. PAI teachers must master basic sign language sufficient to communicate with hearing-impaired students, or collaborate with shadow teachers possessing such expertise. PAI materials typically delivered orally need translation into sign language, either directly by teachers or through videos featuring sign language interpreters (Irfani & Suwanto, 2025). The visualization of religious concepts, such as diagrams regarding the pillars of faith or illustrations of scenes from prophetic stories, greatly assists hearing-impaired students in comprehending subject matter. Written text in the form of captions and subtitles must also be included in all video media utilized during instruction. Teachers need to employ body language, facial expressions, and expressive hand gestures to reinforce the messages they wish to convey. Learning activities involving physical practice, such as practicing prayer movements or ablution motions, prove highly effective because hearing-impaired students can learn through visual imitation. Group discussions can be conducted utilizing whiteboards or digital media to write down questions and answers, ensuring all students can participate equitably. Assessment for hearing-

impaired students can be carried out through observations of worship practices, written tasks, or visual presentations demonstrating their understanding. Through these various adjustments, hearing-impaired students can access and internalize religious values optimally.

Special needs students with intellectual disabilities require a highly structured, concrete, and repetitive teaching approach to comprehend abstract concepts in Islamic Religious Education. PAI teachers need to break down lesson materials into small segments that can be learned progressively, with sufficient repetition to ensure firm understanding. Concepts regarding God, angels, and the afterlife that are highly abstract need explanation through analogies and parables close to students' daily experiences (Sari et al., 2025). The utilization of concrete objects and teaching aids is crucial to assist students with intellectual disabilities in grasping concepts they cannot see directly. Continuous education and concrete habituation are capable of driving behavioral changes and student understanding sustainably (Gautama & Mardikaningsih, 2022). Demonstrations of worship practices must be conducted slowly and gradually, with physical assistance when necessary, until students can perform them independently. Positive reinforcement through praise and rewards proves highly effective in motivating students and building their self-confidence. Teachers also need to provide short, clear, step-by-step instructions and check student understanding after each instruction is given. Tasks and assessments must be adapted to student capabilities, focusing on the achievement of the most essential goals rather than less important details. Parents need to be actively involved in the learning process, as repetition and reinforcement at home are vital for the success of children with intellectual disabilities. With patience, consistency, and creativity, guru can help students with intellectual disabilities acquire meaningful religious understanding for their lives.

Special needs students with autism spectrum disorders require a highly individualized approach that accommodates the unique sensory needs and communication patterns of each student. Autistic students frequently exhibit high sensory sensitivity toward sound, light, or touch, requiring the learning environment to be adjusted to reduce excessive stimulation (Nisrina et al., 2025). A quiet PAI classroom, non-glaring lighting, and seating arrangements providing personal space can help autistic students feel comfortable and focused on

learning. Communication with autistic students must be conducted clearly, directly, and literally, avoiding metaphors or sarcasm that may confuse them. Visual instructions, such as pictorial daily schedules and step-by-step guides regarding worship activities, greatly assist autistic students in understanding expectations and following routines. Autistic students also tend to respond well to structured and repetitive learning, meaning the consistent repetition of schedules and activities can provide a sense of security and reduce anxiety. Adaptive teacher teaching styles and support for religious understanding prove effective in guiding students' moral development and awareness (Al Mursyidi & Darmawan, 2023). PAI teachers need to utilize autistic students' special interests for instance, if they are attracted to numbers or patterns to explain religious concepts related to order and regularity. The use of technology, such as interactive learning applications and animated videos, can serve as an effective medium due to clear and unambiguous visualization. Assessment for autistic students must account for their best way of demonstrating understanding, which may differ from other students, such as through drawings or limited answer choices. With an individualized and understanding approach, autistic students can experience positive PAI learning and develop religious understanding appropriate to their capacity.

The use of assistive technology in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning for children with special needs opens new possibilities previously unreachable for enhancing accessibility and learning effectiveness. Assistive technology encompasses various software and hardware specifically designed to assist individuals with disabilities in overcoming obstacles they face in learning and communicating (Dar et al., 2024). Screen readers can convert text into speech, enabling visually impaired students to access digital PAI materials independently without relying on others. Speech recognition software can assist students with motor disabilities in typing or operating computers using voice commands, allowing them to participate in writing and presentation activities. Augmented reality applications can be utilized to visualize religious objects in three dimensions, enabling students with various disabilities to observe and understand the physical structures of places of worship or religious artifacts. Digital learning platforms equipped with accessibility features, such as alternative text for images, captions for videos, and simple navigation, can be accessed by various categories of special needs students. Educational media innovations and

varied teaching methods prove capable of fostering student learning interest and effectiveness (Laili & Darmawan, 2024). The utilization of adequate support facilities and independence in utilizing media serve as primary strategies in optimizing learning effectiveness (Imanuddin & Darmawan, 2024). PAI teachers need to be trained to utilize this assistive technology and integrate it into their learning designs in a planned and gradual manner. Schools also need to allocate sufficient budgets to purchase and maintain assistive technology devices, alongside providing adequate technical support for teachers and students. Through appropriate technology utilization, the access gap between special needs students and regular students can be significantly narrowed.

The involvement of parents and families in inclusive PAI learning design represents an indispensable component because parents serve as primary information sources regarding children's specific needs and hold a central role in developing religious values at home (Alfiah, 2025). PAI teachers need to establish open and sustainable communication with parents to understand the characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses of each special needs student, ensuring interventions provided at school remain aligned with practices implemented at home. Parental attention and PAI teacher competence play a crucial role in shaping children's character and personality (Firmansyah & Darmawan, 2023). Parents can offer valuable insights regarding which strategies prove most effective in helping children learn, the communication methods most readily accepted, and situations capable of triggering anxiety or problematic behavior. Collaboration between teachers and parents likewise enables consistency within teaching approaches, preventing children from experiencing confusion due to conflicting demands between school and home. The comprehensive character formation of students within the school environment requires a strong pillar through the implementation of a positive school culture and parental upbringing patterns at home (Dena & Darmawan, 2024). Parents can also be involved in the evaluation process by reporting children's religious behavioral developments at home that teachers might fail to observe at school. Schools can organize routine meetings with parents to discuss children's learning progress and formulate learning plans better suited to their needs. Parents of special needs students frequently possess deep experiences and knowledge concerning their children's conditions, which can serve as a valuable resource for schools in designing

inclusive learning programs. Through close partnerships between schools and families, PAI learning for special needs students becomes more integrated and impacts all aspects of children's lives.

The development of an adaptive and flexible Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum serves as a prerequisite for the creation of child-friendly and inclusive learning designs for children with special needs (ABK) across various types of schools. A rigid and uniform curriculum for all students will invariably benefit regular students while disadvantaging special needs students who require adjustments in learning content, processes, and evaluations (Zumara et al., 2025). Legal guarantees regarding children's rights to obtain proper education and protection constitute fundamental principles that educational institutions must fulfill (Hariani et al., 2021). The PAI curriculum needs to provide space for teachers to modify subject materials in accordance with students' ability levels and needs, without compromising the essence of the religious values intended to be achieved. PAI graduation competency standards need to be formulated in a more general and flexible form, enabling them to be attained through diverse pathways and methods. Schools need to develop operational curricula containing concrete guidelines on how to adapt PAI materials, methods, and assessments for various categories of special needs students. This curriculum development should involve multiple stakeholders, including teachers, parents, medical personnel, and inclusive education experts, to ensure that the curriculum remains genuinely responsive to real-world needs in the field. An inclusive PAI curriculum must likewise encompass social and emotional competencies, such as empathy and care, which are vital for all students in interacting with special needs students. Curriculum adjustments should not be perceived as a lowering of standards, but rather as an effort to guarantee that every student obtains a fair opportunity to reach their maximum potential within the religious domain.

The training and professional development of PAI teachers in inclusive education represent a long-term investment that must become a priority in national and local educational policies. Well-trained PAI teachers will possess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to design and implement inclusive learning effectively. Training must encompass an understanding of disability types, individual learning characteristics, and appropriate teaching strategies for each group of special needs students (Warti et al., 2025).

Enhancing teacher competence and managing a conducive school environment serve as primary driving factors in building student learning motivation (Latif & Darmawan, 2024). Teachers also need training in the use of learning aids and assistive technology, as well as in techniques of differentiated learning and inclusive assessment. Training should ideally take the form of not only theory, but also direct practice through simulations and case studies relevant to actual classroom situations. The implementation of adaptive learning yields positive impacts on the effectiveness of both independent and collaborative learning within educational environments (Kurniawan & Darmawan, 2021). Sustainable and tiered training programs will prove more effective than one-off training sessions, as teachers can continuously update and deepen their knowledge alongside scientific and technological advancements. Schools need to allocate sufficient time and budgets for teacher training, alongside providing incentives for teachers who actively develop competencies in inclusive education. Inter-teacher PAI learning communities can serve as an effective platform for sharing experiences and best practices in teaching special needs students. With competent and confident teachers, the implementation of inclusive PAI learning designs will proceed more smoothly and exert a positive impact on all students.

Collaboration between PAI teachers, shadow teachers, therapists, and other professionals is vital to providing integrated support for children with special needs (ABK) in religious learning. Special needs students frequently require interventions from various specialists, such as speech therapists, physiotherapists, or psychologists, whose expertise can enrich the PAI teaching approaches delivered by teachers. PAI teachers and shadow teachers need to work together in planning, executing, and evaluating PAI learning for special needs students, ensuring that academic and therapeutic approaches complement one another. This collaboration likewise enables consistency in handling special needs students, preventing contradictory demands between different programs (Pandia et al., 2023). This synergy among elements aligns with governance principles that account for the distribution of key factors in enhancing the overall effectiveness of educational organizations (Darmawan, 2024). Schools need to establish an inclusion support team consisting of various professionals who meet regularly to discuss the progress and challenges faced by each special needs student. Team members can provide mutual input

and recommendations on how to adjust PAI learning approaches to become more effective for specific students. Collaboration also encompasses cooperation with external school institutions, such as rehabilitation centers or disability organizations, which can supply additional resources and support for schools. Through strong collaboration, inclusive PAI learning becomes more comprehensive and capable of addressing the multidimensional needs of special needs students more effectively.

Authentic assessment in inclusive PAI learning emphasizes the collection of evidence regarding what students can actually do, rather than their ability to answer written questions that may fail to match their conditions (Fatinah et al., 2025). Authentic assessment encompasses observations of student behavior during daily worship practices, their participation in religious activities, and social interactions reflecting the taught moral values. Portfolios containing documentation of student progress over time whether in the form of teacher notes, student work, or parent reports can provide a more holistic picture of special needs student learning achievements. Project-based assessments involving special needs students in practical tasks, such as creating videos on ablution procedures or presenting prophetic stories through drawings, enable them to demonstrate understanding in ways best suited to their capabilities. PAI teachers need to develop flexible assessment rubrics adaptable to various student conditions, featuring clear and measurable criteria for each evaluated aspect. Self-assessment and peer assessment can similarly be utilized, with format and language adjustments matching the comprehension level of special needs students. The results of this authentic assessment are more meaningful and informative for teachers, parents, and students alike, as they provide concrete pictures of what has been learned and what still requires improvement. Through authentic assessment, the PAI learning objective of shaping tangible religious behavior can be measured and achieved more effectively.

The utilization of a thematic approach in inclusive Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning enables teachers to integrate various subjects and skills into a single overarching theme meaningful to students' lives (Nurmasihin et al., 2025). Themes such as family, the surrounding environment, or religious holiday celebrations can serve as an umbrella for PAI learning encompassing multiple aspects, ranging from knowledge regarding religious teachings to worship practices and the development of social attitudes. Through a thematic approach,

teachers can provide richer and more contextual learning experiences for all students, including children with special needs (ABK), because these themes are closely connected to their daily lives. Students with various types of disabilities can engage in thematic projects in diverse ways matching their capabilities, ensuring everyone feels contributing and valued within the learning process. The thematic approach likewise allows teachers to reiterate and reinforce religious concepts through various distinct activities, proving highly beneficial for special needs students who require repetition to comprehend material. Teachers can design theme webs connecting one topic to another, enabling students to perceive the interrelationships among religious teachings and their relevance to various life aspects. The thematic approach equally facilitates parents in supporting learning at home, as they can continue discussions regarding the same theme during daily activities. With this approach, PAI learning becomes more integrated, more meaningful, and more accessible to all students.

Collaborative lesson planning between PAI teachers and parents of special needs students represents a strategic step to ensure that learning designed at school aligns with the approaches and support provided at home (Espejo et al., 2025). Parents possess deep knowledge regarding children's daily habits, interests, and challenges, which can serve as valuable information for teachers in designing appropriate learning activities. PAI teachers can invite parents to participate in lesson planning at the beginning of the academic year, allowing them to convey expectations, concerns, and suggestions concerning religious education for their children. Parents can also be involved in the development of materials or learning media to be utilized, as they frequently harbor creative ideas regarding what works effectively for their children based on experience at home. Routine meetings between teachers and parents to discuss children's progress and encountered hurdles are vital for executing dynamic and responsive adjustments to teaching strategies. Parents can similarly function as teacher assistants at home, continuing practice and reinforcement of materials taught at school, ensuring learning processes proceed continuously and uninterrupted. Parental involvement in the learning process also enhances their sense of ownership and responsibility toward the success of children's religious education. This collaboration creates consistent and simultaneous support for special needs students, both at school and at home.

The support of school principals and educational institution administrators serves as a decisive factor determining the successful implementation of inclusive Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning designs across every educational unit (Hasanah et al., 2025). School principals must possess a clear vision regarding the importance of inclusive education and remain committed to allocating necessary resources, whether in the form of budgets, training, or accessible facilities and infrastructure. Written school policies socialized to all school members concerning the commitment to inclusion are vital for establishing a school culture valuing diversity. The structured application of Islamic Human Capital principles within educational institution management proves to be an effective framework for optimizing the potential of all educators and support staff (Darmawan, 2021). School principals must likewise ensure that PAI teachers obtain the support they require, such as access to training, consultations with experts, and time to collaborate with peers. Rewards and recognition for teachers and staff excelling in developing inclusive practices can serve as effective motivators to continuously enhance learning quality. The management and evaluation of educators' personality characteristics and performance form an essential foundation in maintaining the quality and effectiveness of educational services (Darmawan, 2017). School principals also play a crucial role in involving parents and society in inclusion programs, alongside communicating school policies and progress transparently. With strong leadership and sustainable support from school principals, various innovations in inclusive PAI learning can be implemented and developed continuously. Without this support, teachers' efforts to create child-friendly and inclusive PAI learning will perpetually collide with resource limitations and a lack of coordination.

The utilization of diverse and accessible learning media constitutes a hallmark of child-friendly and inclusive PAI learning design, as media can serve as a bridge between abstract materials and students' concrete understandings (Purnomo et al., 2025). Visual media such as images, posters, and videos can assist special needs students with hearing or intellectual impairments in comprehending religious concepts difficult to explain solely through words. Audio media such as lecture recordings, Quranic recitations, and religious songs can help visually impaired students or students with reading difficulties access materials independently. Interactive media such as educational games, digital quizzes, and simulations

can enhance student learning engagement and motivation, particularly for special needs students with attention deficit disorders. Tactile or three-dimensional media, such as replicas of worship items, are exceptionally beneficial for visually impaired students or students with intellectual disabilities to understand the shapes and functions of objects more concretely. PAI teachers need to select and utilize media matching the types of barriers students possess, alongside varying the media employed within a single meeting to reach various learning styles. The media utilized must likewise be easy to operate and require no high technical skills, enabling students to utilize them independently. Through accessible learning media, all students can learn PAI in the most effective and enjoyable manner for them.

Experiential learning approaches, such as visits to places of worship or simulated worship practices, prove highly effective for all students, particularly children with special needs (ABK) who require the concretization of abstract religious concepts (Fauzi & Nurhidayat, 2025). Through direct experience, students can see, hear, feel, and perform what is being studied firsthand, rendering their comprehension stronger and longer-lasting. Variations in teacher teaching styles capable of triggering learning motivation are proven to exert direct impacts on enhancements in student achievement and material comprehension (Mudzakkir & Darmawan, 2024). Visits to mosques, prayer rooms, or Islamic boarding schools provide opportunities for students to observe worship practices in real-world situations, interact with religious figures, and experience authentic religious atmospheres. Simulations of worship practices such as congregational prayers, ablution, or praying inside classrooms under teacher guidance allow students to practice what they have learned theoretically. For special needs students with physical barriers, simulations can be tailored to their capacities, for instance by employing modified movements or assistive tools that facilitate the execution of worship. The cultivation of learning discipline and self-regulation formed through direct experience plays a major role in driving optimal learning achievement outcomes (Maharani & Darmawan, 2024). Direct experiences likewise assist in developing students' affective and spiritual aspects, as they personally feel the meaning and beauty of the religious teachings being studied. PAI teachers need to plan direct experiences maturely, encompassing necessary preparations, student safety, and follow-up activities to reflect upon those

experiences. Through experiential-based approaches, PAI learning becomes more lively, meaningful, and accessible to all students.

Adjustments toward digital technology development open opportunities for inclusive Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning that is more personal, flexible, and interactive through various platforms and applications accessible by special needs students (Pliasun, 2025). PAI learning applications designed with accessibility principles such as enlargeable text, audio for text, and simple navigation can be utilized independently by students with various types of disabilities. Equalizing access to technology and enhancing digital literacy serve as primary foundations in bridging learning opportunity gaps for all student groups (Arifin & Darmawan, 2021). Online learning platforms supplying PAI content in diverse formats, such as videos featuring subtitles, audio, and text, enable students to select formats best matching their preferences and capabilities. PAI teachers can leverage social media and instant messaging applications to communicate with students and parents, deliver individual guidance, and share learning materials more personally. Interactive and enjoyable game-based learning can enhance the motivation of special needs students who frequently experience rapid boredom with conventional teaching methods. The utilization of digital recording devices enables teachers to provide recorded feedback replayable by students, proving highly useful for students with hearing impairments or information processing barriers. Schools need to ensure that all students possess access to necessary digital devices and adequate internet connections to leverage opportunities offered by technology. Through appropriate digital technology integration, inclusive PAI learning becomes more adaptive and responsive to the individual needs of every student.

The provision of shadow teachers for children with special needs (ABK) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning represents a strategy capable of significantly enhancing learning effectiveness and accessibility. Shadow teachers function as companions tasked with assisting special needs students in following classroom learning processes, providing individual guidance, and facilitating their participation across all activities (Aiyuda et al., 2025). The continuous development of the technical and social competencies of companions is urgently required to prepare educational ecosystems ready to face the challenges of modern learning environments

(Mendonca et al., 2021). Within PAI learning, shadow teachers can assist students with hearing impairments in following teacher explanations through sign language, or help students with motor disabilities in writing and drawing. Shadow teachers can likewise provide emotional and behavioral support for autistic students who may experience anxiety or challenges in following classroom routines. The presence of shadow teachers enables PAI teachers to focus on delivering material to the entire class, while shadow teachers handle individual special needs students' requirements more intensively. Schools need to recruit and train shadow teachers possessing knowledge and skills regarding inclusive education and special needs characteristics, alongside the capability to collaborate with PAI teachers. Shadow teachers must become part of the school's inclusion support team and obtain continuous supervision and guidance. With the support of competent shadow teachers, special needs students can follow PAI learning with heightened self-confidence and achieve more optimal learning outcomes.

Consistency and patience in the implementation of inclusive learning designs serve as keys to long-term success, because change fails to occur in a short time and every advancement, no matter how small, must be appreciated (Gill, 2025). PAI teachers instructing special needs students frequently face repeated setbacks and challenges, alongside accepting the reality that every child's development possesses a distinct rhythm. Success in inclusive education is measured not by identical standards for all students, but by the individual progress achieved by every child throughout their learning journey. Teachers need to celebrate every minor achievement, such as an autistic student's ability to state the pillars of faith correctly, or a hearing-impaired student's capacity to comprehend the meaning of prayer through visualization. Teachers' patience and persistence in providing necessary guidance, repetition, and support heavily influence whether special needs students will persist and thrive in PAI learning or feel frustrated and surrender. Schools and society must similarly support teachers along this long journey by offering recognition and appreciation for their efforts that frequently remain invisible. Through consistency and patience, inclusive PAI learning designs will become an embedded part of school culture, rather than merely a project executed due to policy demands. Ultimately, the commitment to providing meaningful religious education for all children, regardless of their differences, constitutes a tangible

manifestation of religious teachings concerning justice and compassion.

CONCLUSION

The design of child-friendly and inclusive Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for children with special needs (ABK) requires careful planning and consistent implementation across every educational component. The principles of universal design for learning applied in material presentation, student expression, and learning engagement provide a framework that can systematically accommodate students' diverse abilities. Accessibility encompassing the physical environment, media, and learning methods serves as a foundation that must be fulfilled before more specific teaching strategies can be implemented. Teaching strategies for each type of special need whether visual impairment, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, or autism demand distinct approaches tailored to each unique characteristic. Assistive technology and collaboration with various parties, including parents and professionals, enrich and strengthen the execution of inclusive PAI learning. Flexible and continuous authentic assessment provides a more accurate picture of special needs students' learning achievements compared to conventional written tests. Support from school principals, teacher professional development, and parental involvement represent the determining factors for the successful implementation of this design. Inclusive PAI education is not merely an option, but rather a necessity reflecting a commitment to justice and respect for the dignity of every human being.

The implications of this research for educational practice are that PAI teachers must be provided with comprehensive and continuous training regarding inclusive education and teaching strategies for special needs students. Schools are expected to provide accessible facilities and infrastructure, assistive technology, and adequate support personnel to back inclusive PAI learning. The PAI curriculum needs to be revised to grant teachers greater flexibility in adapting materials, methods, and assessments to the needs of special needs students. Suggestions for future research include conducting empirical studies to test the effectiveness of various inclusive PAI learning design models across different school types and with various categories of special needs students. Longitudinal research on the impact of inclusive PAI education on the religious and social development of children with special needs is also urgently required to measure long-term success. Research on the development of

valid and reliable assessment instruments for special needs students in PAI learning also constitutes an area requiring further exploration. National education policies need to provide clearer and more operational guidelines concerning minimum standards for inclusive PAI education across all educational units. By following these suggestions, PAI education in Indonesia will become more equitable, more inclusive, and more meaningful for all learners, including children with special needs who have long been marginalized.

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