



Instructional Strategies in Islamic Religious Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities: A Case Study of Tanjungbalai State Special School

Fauzi Ananda¹, Fauziatun Azhima², Gunawan Syahputra³, Shopiana⁴ Taufik Azhar⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} STAI Nurul Ilmi Tanjungbalai, Indonesia

Email : fauziananda@staini.ac.id, fauziatunazhima@staini.ac.id, gunawan_syahputra@staini.ac.id, shopiana@staini.ac.id, taufikazhar@staini.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

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*Corresponding

Author :

fauziananda@staini.ac.id

Children with intellectual disabilities have the right to receive appropriate education, including Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Due to limitations in cognitive abilities, understanding, and concentration, teachers must implement suitable learning strategies. This qualitative descriptive study explores PAI learning strategies at Tanjungbalai City State Special School through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model. The findings reveal three main strategies: demonstration, behavior modification through positive reinforcement, and fun learning activities such as games, songs, and storytelling. These strategies improve students' participation and enable them to apply religious knowledge in daily life. Learning is evaluated through written, oral, and practical assessments adapted to students' abilities. Supporting factors include students, teachers, and parental involvement, while obstacles include limited cognitive skills, communication difficulties, and challenges in adapting to the environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is essentially a conscious and planned effort carried out to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to possess religious spiritual power, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills needed by themselves, society, the nation, and the state (Abd Rahman, 2022). The presence of a child in a family is the most beautiful gift from Allah SWT. However, not all children are born with physical and psychological perfection; some of them experience abnormalities or developmental disorders present since conception, during delivery, or in early growth. Children with such conditions are categorized as children with special needs (ABK) who urgently require special and adaptive educational services.

Children with special needs certainly have characteristics, levels of understanding, and concentration spans that are vastly different compared to typical children. One group of children with special needs that requires profound attention in the educational world is individuals with intellectual disabilities (tunagrahita). Intellectual disability is a condition of mental retardation where an individual possesses an intellectual capacity (IQ) below average (below 70) as well as limitations in adaptive behavior that emerge during the developmental period (H. Lubis, 2015). These limitations directly impact their difficulties in participating in formal school learning activities, absorbing abstract material, and interacting socially with the surrounding environment.

Despite having intellectual limitations, individuals with intellectual disabilities still possess the same human right to obtain religious guidance through Islamic Religious Education (PAI). PAI learning plays a crucial role in shaping aqidah, noble character, introducing basic worship procedures, and instilling moral values sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith. As stated in the Word of Allah SWT in Surah An-Nahl verse 78, which explains that humans are brought forth from their mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and are endowed with hearing, sight, and hearts so that they may be grateful. This verse implies that every individual, including children with special needs, possesses a potential fitrah that must be guided through sensory approaches and effective learning methods suited to their capacity.

Based on a preliminary study and field observations conducted at SLB Negeri Kota Tanjungbalai, this school is a government formal educational institution that provides services for children with special needs, including the SDLB, SMPLB, and SMALB levels with various classifications of disabilities such as hearing impairment, intellectual disability, and physical disability. In implementing PAI learning for eighth-grade intellectual disability students in SMPLB, it is found that teaching cannot be equated with regular schools. Students with intellectual disabilities experience serious obstacles in receiving theoretical and abstract material. Therefore, PAI teachers and classroom teachers are required to possess high pedagogical competence in formulating concrete, enjoyable, and repetitive learning strategies so that religious messages can be properly absorbed.

Relevant previous research has widely examined PAI learning strategies for students with intellectual disabilities, including research conducted by Refi Febriana (2019) at SLB Harau, Limapuluh Kota Regency, which highlighted the use of demonstration strategies as well as playing, singing, and storytelling (BMC) methods. In addition, research by Fitty Usda Etika Panjaitan (2017) at SLB

Negeri Pembina, North Sumatra Province, emphasized the importance of the expository approach as well as students' memory and language constraints.

Furthermore, research by Ummu Sulaim (2020) at SLB-C YPSLB Gemolong, Sragen, focused on character formation through exemplary modeling and habituation. Nonetheless, in-depth research that comprehensively integrates the analysis of demonstration strategies, behavior modification, BMC methods, contextual evaluation implications, and psycholinguistic barriers at SLB Negeri Kota Tanjungbalai remains rarely explored in depth.

Based on this theoretical gap and social fact, the primary objective of writing this journal article is to describe in depth PAI learning strategies for children with special needs with intellectual disabilities at SLB Negeri Kota Tanjungbalai, analyze the implications and forms of learning evaluations applied, and identify the supporting and inhibiting factors encountered in the learning process. Through this study, it is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic Religious Education scholarship and practical contributions to improving the quality of special education services in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review in this study is focused on the conceptual framework underlying the implementation of PAI learning for students with intellectual disabilities. Conceptually, a learning strategy represents general patterns of teacher and student activities in realizing teaching and learning activities to achieve outlined objectives (Pane, 2017). In the context of special education, the selection of strategies must be based on the principles of flexibility, concreteness, and student-centered individual needs. According to Sanjaya (in Panggabean, 2021), learning strategies encompass not only material delivery methods, but also the arrangement of the learning environment and management of educational interactions.

The demonstration learning strategy plays an important role in teaching religious psychomotor aspects, such as ablution procedures and prayer movements. This strategy involves real or simulated modeling that demonstrates a process so that students can observe directly and imitate it (Husain & Wardana, 2021). In addition, the behavior modification approach is applied to form positive habits and direct student behavior toward greater independence through positive reinforcement in the form of praise, flattery, or rewards (Winaya, 2019). Meanwhile, enjoyable learning strategies through Playing, Singing, and Storytelling (BMC) have proven effective in reducing boredom, increasing

concentration, and fostering intrinsic motivation in students with intellectual disabilities.

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) itself is understood as a conscious and planned effort in guiding students to be able to understand, internalize, believe, and practice Islamic teachings kaffah, sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith (Dahwadin, 2019). The functions of PAI include aspects of faith development, moral value inculcation, mental adjustment, character improvement, prevention of negative influences, and channeling of religious talents (Indrianto, 2020). For children with intellectual disabilities, the mastery of PAI material is adjusted to their ability classifications, ranging from mild intellectual disability (educable with IQ 50-70), moderate intellectual disability (trainable with IQ 30-50), to severe intellectual disability (custodial with IQ below 30) (Sembiring, 2020).

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the researcher intends to describe, understand, and explore in depth social phenomena and empirical realities related to PAI learning strategies for children with special needs with intellectual disabilities at SLB Negeri Kota Tanjungbalai (Abdussamad, 2021). The case study design allows for comprehensive, detailed, and holistic data collection regarding classroom interactions.

The research location is SLB Negeri Kota Tanjungbalai, located on Jalan Abadi, Tanjungbalai Kota II Village, Tanjungbalai Selatan District, Tanjungbalai City, North Sumatra Province. The focus of research informants includes the Principal (Nino, M.Si), the Islamic Religious Education teacher (Ayuni, S.Pd), the eighth-grade SMPLB classroom teacher (Indah, S.Pd / teaching team), and parents of students with intellectual disabilities. Data sources are classified into primary data obtained directly through participant observation and in-depth interviews, and secondary data sourced from school profile documentation, infrastructure data, student archives, and supporting literature (Sugiyono, 2020).

Data collection techniques were carried out through three main methods: (1) Direct observation of the PAI teaching and learning process in eighth grade SMPLB; (2) Semi-structured interviews with prepared question guidelines to extract in-depth information from key informants; and (3) Documentation to examine official school photos and learning activity documents (Abdussamad, 2021; Saleh, 2017). Data analysis techniques utilized the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana interactive model, which includes four continuous stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification.

Checking the validity of data was performed through prolonged observation techniques and triangulation of sources and methods to ensure the credibility of research findings (Moleong, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

General findings of the study indicate that SLB Negeri Kota Tanjungbalai is a formal educational institution under local government auspices, situated on a strategic plot of land in the downtown area. The school holds a C accreditation based on Decree No. 420/734/BID.PK/X/2022, providing education for the SDLB, SMPLB, and SMALB levels. The primary vision of the school is to develop students' abilities so they become skilled, independent, and pious individuals. The total number of students at the SMPLB level is recorded at 27 people, consisting of 11 hearing-impaired students and 16 students with intellectual disabilities. Specifically, in the eighth-grade SMPLB intellectual disability class, there are 20 students (8 boys and 12 girls) receiving intensive guidance services from professional educators.

Based on specific findings in the field, the implementation of PAI learning strategies for students with intellectual disabilities at SLB Negeri Kota Tanjungbalai relies on three main strategies applied in an integrated manner by the PAI teacher (Mrs. Ayuni, S.Pd) and classroom teachers:

Demonstration Strategy

Learning is focused on concrete practical activities, especially in ritual procedure materials such as ablution movements and prayer. The teacher demonstrates movements directly in front of the class, after which students are guided to imitate them repeatedly until motor memory is formed.

Behavior Modification Strategy

A behavioral approach aimed at shaping discipline and noble character. Teachers provide positive reinforcement in the form of verbal praise ("Smart child, pious child") and appreciation whenever students successfully complete simple tasks.

Fun Learning Strategy (Playing, Singing, and Storytelling - BMC)

This strategy is applied to overcome boredom and low student concentration spans. Teachers intersperse theoretical material with enthusiastic clapping, singing religious songs, and telling stories of exemplary prophets.

The implications of PAI learning are clearly visible through the progress and positive changes observed in the students. Although initially many students

were unable to read the Qur'an (Iqra') and perform prayer movements correctly, through patient and repetitive guidance, students began showing improvements in memorizing daily supplications, short surahs, and worship discipline. The learning evaluation phase is conducted through simple written tests (multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank), oral tests (memorization of prayers and short surahs), and psychomotor assessments (daily worship practice), where grading standards are flexibly adjusted to the cognitive capabilities of individual students (Lubis, 2020).

In the learning process, main supporting factors include high enthusiasm from students, competence and dedication of PAI and classroom teachers, and strong moral support from the family environment (parents). Nonetheless, several significant inhibiting factors were also identified, including:

Cognitive Learning Problems

Limited intellectual capacity (below-average IQ) causes students to struggle with understanding abstract material, possess weak short-term memory, and require months of material repetition (Rosnawati, 2020).

Adjustment Problems

Students with intellectual disabilities tend to experience barriers in social adaptation, find it difficult to socialize broadly with peers outside their small group, and occasionally exhibit unique behaviors requiring special approaches.

Language and Communication Issues

Voice articulation barriers, speech disorders (stuttering), and limited vocabulary mastery make verbal communication unclear, requiring teachers to use short, single sentences alongside visual aids.

Table 1. Recapitulation of Findings on PAI Learning Strategies and Barriers

Research Aspect	Findings at SLB Negeri Kota Tanjungbalai	Pedagogical & Theoretical Analysis
Learning Strategies	Demonstration strategy, behavior modification, and Playing-Singing-Storytelling (BMC).	Highly effective in overcoming abstract limitations; maximizes students' motor memory and affective aspects.
Implications & Evaluation	Increased short surah memorization, prayer practice, and contextual formative/summative evaluations.	Evaluations adapted to individual capacities; focuses on the process of noble character building and independence.
Inhibiting Factors	Limited cognitive memory, social adjustment barriers, and unclear language articulation.	Requires extra patience, continuous material repetition, and tight synergy with parents at home.

Discussion

In-depth analysis results indicate that the implementation of PAI learning strategies at SLB Negeri Kota Tanjungbalai has operated synergistically with the

psychological characteristics of students with intellectual disabilities. Based on the theory put forward by Sanjaya (in Panggabean, 2021), learning effectiveness is largely determined by the accuracy of strategy selection aligned with student conditions. Because students with intellectual disabilities have below-average IQs and experience abstract thinking barriers, conventional lecture methods would certainly lead to total failure. Therefore, a concrete approach via demonstration strategies becomes the primary pillar in instilling religious ritual understandings such as ablution and prayer (Febriana, 2019).

Behavior modification strategies applied through verbal praise and positive reinforcement are proven capable of building extrinsic motivation while fostering self-confidence in students with intellectual disabilities. In line with Winaya's perspective (2019), consistent positive reinforcement can shape independent personalities and steer student behavior toward expected norms. Furthermore, the integration of enjoyable learning strategies through Playing, Singing, and Storytelling (BMC) provides a comfortable emotional space for students, enabling learning fatigue to be optimally eliminated (Indriani, 2019).

From the aspects of implication and evaluation, the findings of this study confirm that the learning progress of students with intellectual disabilities cannot be measured using rigid quantitative standards like regular schools. Evaluations must be holistic and contextual, encompassing affective aspects, discipline, and daily behavioral habituation (Lubis, 2020). Psycholinguistic barriers in the form of speech disorders and vocabulary limitations found in the field demand that teachers constantly utilize short, simple instruction sentences supported by adequate visual media. Synergy among PAI teachers, classroom teachers, and parents serves as the ultimate determinant of success in shaping the religious character of students with intellectual disabilities at SLB Negeri Kota Tanjungbalai.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning for students with intellectual disabilities at SLB Negeri Kota Tanjungbalai is most effective when it is adapted to the cognitive, behavioral, and communicative characteristics of the learners. The findings reveal that the integration of demonstration, behavior modification, and Playing-Singing-Storytelling (BMC) strategies enables teachers to transform abstract Islamic concepts into concrete and meaningful learning experiences. These strategies not only facilitate students' understanding of fundamental religious practices, such as ablution, prayer, and the memorization of daily supplications,

but also strengthen positive behaviors, discipline, self-confidence, and religious character. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that learning evaluation should prioritize individual progress, behavioral development, and practical religious competencies rather than rigid academic achievement. The success of the learning process is also strongly supported by collaborative partnerships among PAI teachers, classroom teachers, and parents, which provide continuous reinforcement of religious values both at school and at home.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Islamic Religious Education in special education by emphasizing that adaptive, student-centered instructional strategies are essential for addressing the unique learning characteristics of students with intellectual disabilities. Practically, the findings provide valuable guidance for teachers, school administrators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in designing inclusive and contextually relevant PAI programs that emphasize concrete instruction, repeated practice, positive reinforcement, and individualized assessment. Nevertheless, this study is limited to a single case at one state special school, making the findings context-specific and not fully generalizable to other educational settings or disability categories. Future research is therefore recommended to involve multiple special schools, employ comparative or mixed-method approaches, investigate the long-term impact of adaptive PAI strategies on students' religious behavior and independence, and explore the integration of digital learning media and assistive technologies to further enhance the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education for students with diverse special educational needs.

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