

Islamic Religious Education Learning for Children at Extraordinary Middle School for Special Needs, Sorong City

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) for children with special needs at a public special junior high school in Sorong City. It employs a qualitative descriptive method using observation, interviews, and documentation involving the school principal, two teachers, one parent, and three students with intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, and autism. The findings indicate that IRE is not taught by specialized IRE teachers but instead by classroom teachers through an internal rotation system, often without formal training in Islamic education or special needs pedagogy. The curriculum is simplified and thematic and does not fully align with the official syllabus. Teaching methods are still dominated by lectures and storytelling without adaptive media. In fact, students respond more positively to visual, practical, and audiovisual learning approaches. The study concludes that IRE instruction has not yet been inclusive and highlights the importance of trained teachers and the development of adaptive teaching materials.

Keywords: *Islamic religious education, children with special needs, special schools, inclusive learning*

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INTRODUCTION

Learning an Islamic religious education subject plays a crucial role in shaping character, morals, and students' religious identity (Tang et al., 2018: 27-28; and Ayu Sadewi & M. Makhrus, 2024: 11-12). Islamic Religious Education Learning not only serves as a transfer of religious knowledge for children with special needs but also as a means of developing spiritual, social, and independent aspects appropriate to their needs and abilities (Nurul Dwi Mutia et al. 2025: 74). In Southwest Papua, including Sorong City and surrounding regencies, the existence of special schools and inclusive learning practices requires a special study of Islamic Religious Education, which is designed and implemented to ensure



effective, relevant, and equitable education for children with special needs. Geographical conditions, local cultural diversity, and the availability of educators with specialized competencies are among the contextual factors influencing Islamic Religious Education practices in this region (Anakotta et al., 2019: 29; Ayu Sadewi & M. Makhrus, 2024: 12; and Nurul Dwi Mutia et al., 2025: 75).

Problems that frequently arise in the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (Manshur and Munif 2023: 56) for Special Needs include: limited resources and adapted learning models of differentiation (Ta'ba' et al., 2024: 33; and Veronika & Dian Nitari Ribanor Sabarudin, 2024: 323), Lack of Islamic Religious Education teacher training on learning strategies for special needs students (Ashari 2024: 87), limited facilities or infrastructure to support special learning, and challenges in assessing religious competencies fairly and meaningfully for the diverse and specific needs of students (Syaifuddin, 2020: 453-454; Khoirunnisa, 2023: 41-44; and Nurul Dwi Mutia et al., 2025: 74). Therefore, this research is necessary to describe learning practices, identify supporting and inhibiting factors, and formulate appropriate recommendations for Islamic Religious Education learning models in the context of the Extraordinary Middle School for Special Needs in Sorong City and its surrounding areas.

Among various subjects, Islamic religious education plays a crucial role in shaping and developing the character, morality, and spirituality of students (Ipa Salma Alhamid; Indria Nur, and Hasbullah 2024: 29). This is stipulated in Government Regulation as in Ministerial Decree (MD) No. 25 on Graduate Competency Standards (SKL), Ministerial Decree of 2006, which states that religious education is a mandatory part of the national curriculum (Mazufлах et al., 2021: 817; and Nirwan & Hasbullah, 2021: 30). The inclusive implementation of the Islamic education subject needs to be adapted to suit the characteristics of children with special needs (Oktari, Harmi, and Wanto 2020: 13), who require a different pedagogical approach than normal students (Avramidis and Norwich 2002: 135).

Sorong City, the capital of Southwest Papua Province, has shown significant progress in the education sector (Mahu, 2024: 86; and Suparman, 2024: 40).

However, the provision of special education services remains limited (Khoirunnisa 2023: 35-40). Currently, there is only one special school in Sorong City, Southwest Papua Province, Indonesia, that caters to various types of disabilities, ranging from elementary school to high school. This situation presents unique challenges in education management, including the implementation of Islamic Religious Education at the junior high school level (Prabowo et al., 2021: 24-25; and Sokoy & Qomarrullah, 2025: 263).

Based on initial observations at the Sorong City Public Junior High School for special needs, several problems were identified in the implementation of the Islamic education subject (Ashari 2024: 91-94). First, Islamic education instruction is not conducted by teachers with a background in religious education, but rather by class teachers or special education teachers who lack specific pedagogical competencies in it. Second, the learning process is conducted in mixed classes without considering the special needs of each student. Third, the availability of relevant and adaptive learning media is still limited.

These issues indicate a gap between inclusive policies and implementation on the ground. Therefore, this research is crucial for considering and offering recommendations for implementing Islamic education instruction for children with special needs at Sorong City Public Junior High School. Thus, this study focuses on how Islamic Religious Education is implemented for children with special needs and the challenges and obstacles encountered in its implementation at a Public Junior High School in Sorong City. This emphasis on these aspects aims to gain a deeper understanding of the practice of religious education in the context of special education, which is complex due to the diverse characteristics of students.

METHOD

This research was conducted at a single location, the Sorong City State Junior High School for Special Needs, the only special needs school in the region. This study used a qualitative approach (Leba, Butarbutar, and Werang 2021: 2751). It was descriptive and exploratory (Creswell and Clark 2011: 137). Therefore, the research findings were not intended to be generalized to all special needs schools, but rather to provide a contextual (Laka et al. 2024: 10-11) and a reflective overview

of Islamic Religious Education learning practices at the study site (Oktari et al., 2020: 13; and Li, 2023: 1-2).

The limitations of this study include limited data, a limited number of informants, and the diversity of disabilities that lead to varying learning needs. The different characteristics of students with intellectual disabilities, such as those with hearing impairments and autism, require very specific pedagogical strategies (Oktari et al., 2020: 19; and Khoirunnisa, 2023: 58). However, this study employed a general approach due to time and resource constraints.

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design (Sokoy & Qomarrullah, 2025: 265; and Veronika & Dian Nitari Ribanor Sabarudin, 2024: 323), aiming to explore and understand the meaning of teachers' and students' experiences in implementing Islamic Religious Education learning at the Sorong City State Junior High School for Special Needs. The phenomenological design was chosen because the focus of this research was to understand the phenomenon of religious learning from the perspectives of those directly involved: teachers, students, and the principal (Manshur & Munif, 2023: 56).

The research was conducted at the Sorong City State Junior High School for Special Needs, the only public junior high school for special needs in the city that provides educational services from elementary school to high school, including Islamic religious education. The data sources for this study are: one Islamic Religious Education teacher (who served on duty, although not with an Islamic education teacher background); one class teacher/special needs teacher involved in teaching; one principal responsible for administration and curriculum; and students with special needs as the primary learning subject.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, conducted semi-structured with teachers, the principal, and students (Creswell, 2009: 79). Participant observation directly observed classroom learning activities, and a documentation study, in the form of an analysis of the syllabus, lesson plans, and teaching media used in Islamic education learning (Sarwono 2011: 132). Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman model (Mataputun 2020: 227), which includes three stages: data reduction – selecting and simplifying relevant data; data

presentation – organizing data in narrative or tabular form; and conclusion drawing and verification – interpreting data and verifying its validity (Che Md Ghazali 2016: 150-153). Data Validity Testing is carried out using source and method triangulation techniques, member checking (confirmation with informants), and an audit trail of field data (Che Md Ghazali 2016: 150-154) (Lambert et al., 2025: 6-8).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study gained data on teaching staff, administrative staff, and students, as shown in the following table.

Table 1. *Educators and Educational Staff*

Initial Name	Position
NW	Principal/Islamic Religious Education Educator, Grade VIII
EHW	Vice Principal for Curriculum, Treasurer of BOS, ARKAS Operator & Christian Religious Education Educator
DSA.	Vice Principal for Facilities and Infrastructure/PJOK Educator
NJM.	UKS & Islamic Religious Education Teacher for Grade VII
RDKW	Vice Principal for Student Affairs/Islamic Religious Education Teacher for Grade IX
KIs	Educational Staff

Source: Profile of the Sorong City Public Junior High School of Special Needs (SMPLB) "processed by the author", 2025.

The following data pertains to the Study Groups at Sorong City Public Junior High School.

Table 2. *Study Groups with Disabilities*

No.	Class	Obstacles	Total
1	VII	Intellectual/Mental Impairment (C)	3
2	VII	Intellectual/Mental Impairment (C1)	5
3	VII	Physical/Physical Impairment (D)	4
4	VII	Autistic (Q)	1
5	VIII	Hearing/Deafness (B)	3
6	VIII	Intellectual/Mental Impairment (C)	3
7	VIII	Intellectual/Mental Impairment (C1)	4

8	VIII	Physical/Physical Impairment (D)	2
9	VIII	Autistic (Q)	3
10	IX	Hearing/Deafness (B)	1
11	IX	Intellectual/Mental Impairment (C)	9
12	IX	Intellectual/Mental Impairment (C1)	2
13	IX	Autistic (Q)	2
Total			42

Source: Profile of Public Junior High Schools in Sorong City (processed by the author), 2025.

Students in Islamic Religious Education Learning

Table 4.3 *Students in Islamic Religious Education*

No.	Class	Disabled Std Names	Sex (Male/Female)	Obstacles
1	VII	RAT	Female	Autism
2	VII	AdP	Male	Intellectual
3	VII	NAz	Female	Intellectual
4	VII	MikA	Male	Intellectual
5	VII	NuK	Female	Intellectual
6	VII	MRR	Male	Intellectual
7	VIII	RM	Male	Hearing
8	VIII	FeAr	Male	Hearing
9	VIII	TS	Male	Physics
10	VIII	Sl	Male	Intellectual
11	VIII	Am	Female	Intellectual
12	VIII	Ha	Male	Intellectual
13	VIII	Fd	Male	Intellectual
14	VIII	Ft	Male	Autism
15	VIII	Af	Male	Autism
16	IX	ADA	Male	Autism
17	IX	MIRA	Male	Autism
18	IX	UAN	Female	Hearing

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19	IX	A A A	Female	Intellectual
20	IX	DW	Female	Intellectual
21	IX	MYA	Male	Intellectual
22	IX	IH	Male	Intellectual
23	VII	DH	Male	Intellectual
24	VII	MD	Male	Intellectual
25	VII	AR	Male	Intellectual
26	VIII	ChK	Female	Intellectual
27	VIII	BHR	Male	Intellectual
28	VIII	CBA	Male	Intellectual
29	VIII	BRA	Male	Intellectual
30	VIII	ACR	Male	Intellectual
31	VIII	ABT	Male	Hearing
32	VIII	CH	Male	Hearing
33	VIII	DMY	Female	Hearing
34	VIII	YKR	Female	Physics
35	VIII	HSD	Female	Autism
36	IX	CHM	Male	Mental Impairment
37	IX	EFR	Male	Mental Impairment
38	IX	RFH	Female	Mental Impairment
39	IX	HRA	Female	Mental Impairment
40	IX	BTR	Female	Mental Impairment
41	IX	CHT	Female	Mental Impairment
42	IX	CTR	Female	Mental Impairment

Interview Results

Implementation of Islamic Religious Education for Special Needs Students at a Public Junior High School in Sorong City

According to interviews with the principal, it was discovered that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction at the Public Junior High School in Sorong City is not yet handled by specialized religious teachers. The principal explained that the appointment of PAI teachers is carried out through a rotation system among available teachers, rather than based on religious education background. This is due to the lack of PAI teachers with specialized qualifications, either in Islamic studies or in special education (PLB). The principal stated:

"We don't have any teachers with a background in Islamic religious education. So, PAI teachers are usually appointed from among the available teachers, using a rotation system."

Interviews with two teachers who teach PAI confirmed that learning is conducted in a class-based manner with a simple thematic approach. The material taught includes morality towards parents and teachers, ablution practices, and an introduction to the pillars of faith and Islam. However, the delivery of the material does not adhere to a structured official syllabus. Teachers tend to rely on personal experience and adapt the material intuitively based on the students' circumstances. One teacher explained:

"We don't have a specific Islamic Religious Education curriculum. I usually take it from a general textbook and simplify it myself so the children can follow along."

Another teacher added that the learning process is often informal, and limited teaching media is a major obstacle. Both teachers also revealed that they had never received training in teaching Islamic Religious Education to children with special needs. Data from interviews with parents supported these findings. One parent stated that religious education is essential for children's spiritual development, but she felt it was not optimal due to the limited number of teachers and media resources.

"My child once told me about ablution, but I don't see any regular religious activities or special guidance."

From the student perspective, interviews with three students revealed that they were enthusiastic about participating in religious education. One student with intellectual disability, in grade 7, said:

"I like learning to pray and ablution."

Student 1 – Mild Intellectual Disability (Grade VII)

The first student has a mild intellectual disability (mental disability). He can communicate verbally using simple sentences. When asked if he enjoys religious studies at school, he simply replied,

"I like it."

When asked what he learns, he replied: *"Learning ablution and prayer."*

He also mentioned that if he has difficulty understanding the lessons, his teacher will help him:

"The teacher helps me."

Regarding his learning style, this student stated that he prefers learning using visual media:

"I like pictures."

This designates that visual learning helps him understand religious material. This student responds well to a concrete and simple approach.

Student 2 – Deaf (Grade VIII)

The second student has a hearing impairment (deafness) and communicates using gestures and visual aids. During the interview, he did not respond verbally but provided strong nonverbal responses.

When asked if he enjoys religious studies, *he nodded and smiled.*

When shown a picture of ablution water, *he pointed to it*, indicating that *he recognized and understood the material.*

When asked who helps him if he doesn't understand, *he pointed to the teacher, indicating that the teacher plays an important role in assisting him during his learning.*

When given a choice of learning media (pictures, stories, practical exercises), this student *expressed enjoyment when shown visual media, indicating that image-based learning is very suitable for him.*

Student 3 – Mild Autism (Grade IX)

The third student is a student with mild autism. He can answer questions verbally, albeit in short, limited sentences. When asked about religious studies, he replied:

“I like to pray.”

When asked to describe the material he is studying, he stated:

“I learn to pray.”

When asked who helps him if he doesn't understand the lesson, this student replied:

“My teacher helps me.”

This student also expressed his preference for dynamic visual learning media:

“I like watching videos.”

These responses indicate that audiovisual-based learning and religious practices are more effective for children with autism, who generally respond better to concrete and repetitive stimuli.

The deaf student showed a positive response through gestures when shown images of ablution and prayer movements, indicating that visual learning is more acceptable. Meanwhile, students with autism were more enthusiastic about practical activities and visual aids.

From the three student interviews described, it can be concluded that all students showed interest in Islamic Religious Education learning. Although they have different characteristics of disabilities, they tended to respond more positively to visual approaches, hands-on practice, and individualized teacher support.

These findings indicate that learning based solely on lectures or oral narratives without visual aids will be difficult for students with special needs to absorb. Therefore, learning methods that utilize images, videos, and practical activities such as ablution and prayer are more effective and preferred by students.

Furthermore, the presence of a responsive teacher is crucial for the success of students' understanding of religious values.

Implementation of Learning Processes Adapted to the Needs of Children with Special Needs (ABK)

The implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning at the Sorong City Public Junior High School (SMPLB) has not been fully adapted to the types and characteristics of student needs. This is evident in the lack of special aids such as sign language for deaf students or sensory media for autistic and mentally retarded students. Teachers acknowledged that the methods used are general and not based on specific instructional adaptations. One teacher stated:

"I don't know a specific way to teach deaf or autistic children. I usually just use stories and pictures."

Interviews with the principal confirmed that limited learning resources are an issue that has not been optimally addressed. The school does not yet have a collection of religious-based learning media designed for students with special needs. He stated:

"Indeed, our media is still very limited. There are no visual or audio aids for religious lessons."

A parent also expressed his hope that religious instruction in special needs schools would be tailored to their child's specific needs:

"I hope there will be a dedicated religious teacher and appropriate learning methods, so my child can understand and practice religion better."

Interviews with students revealed that

The most preferred approach was the use of visual media and hands-on practice. Students with intellectual disabilities are more responsive to images, while students with autism tend to gravitate towards motor activities such as practicing ablution. However, due to the lack of specially designed media or methods, students' potential to understand and internalize Islamic values has not yet developed optimally.

Observations and interviews revealed that lecture and question-and-answer methods dominate the learning process. Teachers also have not modified the

content to suit the cognitive capacities of students, especially those with intellectual disabilities. This makes abstract material, such as the articles of faith, difficult for most students to understand.

In addition to methods, learning media are also limited. Teachers rely on pictures from general textbooks and the whiteboard as primary aids. Audiovisual equipment, three-dimensional props, or other adaptive media relevant to the sensory and communication needs of students with special needs are not available.

This finding aligns with the statement that Islamic Religious Education learning for students with special needs must consider adaptive aspects in terms of materials, methods, media, and evaluation. Without such adaptation, learning risks not achieving the spiritual and moral goals expected in religious education.

Discussion

Implementation of Islamic Religious Education for Children with Special Needs (ABK) at a Public Junior High School in Sorong City

Observations and interviews indicate that Islamic Religious Education at a Public Junior High School in Sorong City is conducted by classroom teachers who lack a background in Islamic religious education. The appointment of Islamic Religious Education (IS) teachers is not specific but rather refers to an internal rotation system among available teachers. This situation results in the approach used in Islamic religious education not fully aligning with religious pedagogical principles.

Learning is conducted in a classical format with a simple thematic approach. Some topics taught include morals towards parents and teachers, ablution practices, and an introduction to the pillars of faith and Islam. However, the delivery of material is not based on a systematic Islamic Religious Education (IS) syllabus. Teachers rely more on intuition and personal experience in delivering the material, resulting in an informal and limited learning process.

These findings support research by Suryana (2021), who stated that one of the main obstacles to religious education in special needs schools is the lack of specialist teachers. This results in the low quality of the transfer of conceptual and spiritual Islamic values.

Implementation of Learning Processes Adapted to the Needs of Children with Special Needs

In its implementation, learning has not specifically considered the specific needs of children (Oktari et al., 2020: 22-23; and Dzulfian Syafrian, 2025: 41-42);. For example, deaf students are not provided with visual aids or special sign language (Ta'ba' et al., 2024: 36-40), while children with intellectual disabilities have difficulty understanding abstract material, such as the concept of faith (Veronika and Dian Nitari Ribanor Sabarudin 2024: 326). Teachers use simple lecture methods and occasionally tell stories, but there are no specific instructional adaptations to support successful learning.

Furthermore, the learning media used are very limited. Teachers rely more on pictures from general textbooks and the blackboard. There are no audio-visual aids or sensory-based materials appropriate to support the characteristics of children with special needs. This demonstrates a gap between the principle of inclusivity in education and actual practice in the field.

This aligns with the view of (Ayu Sadewi & M. Makhrus, 2024: 18-20; Sugiri, 2023: 349; and Arsyad, 2023: 445-447), who argue that the implementation of religious learning for children with special needs must consider adaptive aspects in materials, methods, media, and evaluation. Without these, learning has the potential to fail to achieve the desired spiritual and moral goals.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning at a public junior high school in Sorong City continues to face various limitations, including those related to teaching staff, methods, media, and adapting to the needs of children with special needs. The Islamic education learning is conducted by classroom teachers without a religious education background, utilizing simple methods and without a structured syllabus. This results in suboptimal delivery of Islamic religious material, particularly in internalizing spiritual values for students with various disabilities.

The implementation of learning has not been optimally adapted to the characteristics and needs of each type of disability. The lack of special assistive

media and adaptive learning methods is a major obstacle in conveying religious concepts to students. Furthermore, teachers face difficulties in managing heterogeneous classes and explaining abstract materials such as creeds or worship. Learning implementation involves three main stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. Planning is developed with consideration for students' intellectual and emotional well-being; implementation utilizes communicative methods, including demonstrations, storytelling, and hands-on practice; and evaluation is conducted authentically through observation and communication with parents. This process emphasizes the importance of developing students' character and independence, not just cognitive aspects.

However, the implementation of learning faces several significant challenges, including the lack of PAI-certified teachers with special education competencies, the combination of students with various disabilities in a class, and the limited availability of adaptive learning media. This has resulted in the low effectiveness of delivering Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials to students with diverse needs. This situation highlights the importance of improving the quality of teaching staff, adopting a more targeted pedagogical approach, and developing contextual and multisensory teaching media.

Overall, the results of this study emphasize the importance of serious attention to providing competent PAI teachers in special needs education, as well as the need for training and facilities that support contextual, enjoyable, and appropriate religious learning for students with special needs. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction at the Sorong City State Junior High School for Special Needs (SMPLB) has been implemented inclusively and adaptively. The learning process is tailored to the characteristics of students with special needs through the use of concrete methods, visual media, sign language, and a flexible, individual approach. Teachers also prioritize students' emotional readiness before the lesson begins and encourage positive social interactions through collaborative activities. The primary goal of learning is to develop students' fundamental understanding of Islamic values, such as faith, worship, and morals, according to each individual's capacity.

The recommendations are that, first, regional governments, through the education office and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, need to appoint or distribute Islamic Religious Education teachers with a background in religious education and training in special education. Secondly, the development of sensory, visual, and simple technology-based teaching media that are relevant for students with intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, and other special needs is needed. Methods such as practice-based learning and simulations can strengthen student understanding. Third, the classroom teachers and special education teachers currently handling Islamic Religious Education need to receive training in religious pedagogy and how to deliver religious material with an inclusive approach. Fourth, an Islamic religious education curriculum specifically designed for children with special needs is needed, taking into account their cognitive, social, and affective levels. Fifth, similar research is recommended in other special schools in various regions to obtain a broader picture and compare the best approaches to Islamic Religious Education teaching for children with special needs.

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