

Promoting Inclusive Education: Enhancing the Quality and Addressing Challenges in Teaching Islamic Religious Education to Children with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT

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The focus of this research is on the collaboration between teachers' roles and parental participation in creating effective learning for children with special needs through an inclusive curriculum. This study is a qualitative field research using a descriptive survey technique. Informants are comprised of school principals, teachers, and several staff members. Informant selection was done using data representatives technique. The results of the study show that (1) efforts by teachers in teaching children with special needs are carried out through understanding the needs of the child, adjusting the learning materials, creating structured lesson plans, utilizing technology, developing social and personal skills of the child, developing vocational skills, evaluating and revising the learning process, and (2) the development of the curriculum for children with special needs involves parental participation by improving communication, creating a conducive learning environment, assisting children with homework, encouraging creative learning activities, and building positive emotional relationships.



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ABSTRAK**Kata Kunci:**

Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus, Pendidikan Inklusif, Pendidikan Agama Islam, Mutu Pendidikan..

Fokus penelitian terhadap efektivitas pembelajaran pendidikan agama Islam (PAI) bagi anak berkebutuhan khusus. Penelitian mengidentifikasi dinamika problematika proses pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam bagi anak berkebutuhan khusus. Penelitian berjenis kualitatif dan mengambil lokus pada Sekolah Luar Biasa Negeri Aneuk Naggroe Lhokseumawe. Data dikumpulkan melalui kegiatan wawancara, pengamatan partisipatif, dan dukungan dokumentasi. Data diolah menggunakan teknik reduksi data, sajian data kemudian diverifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan beberapa poin kesimpulan yaitu (1) Proses pembelajaran dimodifikasi sesuai kapasitas dengan kebutuhan anak berkebutuhan khusus. Metode pembelajaran imitasi dan demonstrasi dan materi bersifat abstrak diminimalisir dalam sistem pembelajaran, Strategi dalam pembelajaran menggunakan strategi *inquiry*, medianya berupa benda konkret, kartu kata, huruf *hijaiyah*, huruf *braille*, dan alat pendukung lainnya. Evaluasi hasil pembelajaran pendidikan agama Islam pada Anak berkebutuhan khusus, melalui kegiatan rumah, praktik ibadah, ujian tengah semester, dan ujian semester. (2) Peran guru pendidikan agama Islam di sekolah berkebutuhan khusus mampu bertindak sebagai inspirator, motivator, organisator, pengelola, mediator, dan fasilitator serta evaluator. (3) Faktor pendukung guru pendidikan agama Islam dalam pembelajaran adalah lingkungan internal (guru-fasilitas-layanan) dan faktor lingkungan eksternal (orang tua-masyarakat-dan dinas pendidikan). (4) Faktor penghambat guru pendidikan agama Islam, antara lain adalah: Kondisi siswa yang memiliki kekurangan mental, fisik, dan intelektual, Rasio guru pendidikan agama Islam yang tidak ideal, latar belakang akademik guru bukan lulusan dari pendidikan luar biasa (PLB), jadwal pembelajaran pendidikan agama Islam sering kali digabungkan sehingga menghambat komunikasi.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is founded on the principle of providing equal educational opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their abilities or disabilities ([Lee et al., 2015](#); [OECD and Asian Development Bank, 2015](#)). Children with special needs, including those with physical or mental limitations, are an integral part of society, and it is essential to recognize and accept their unique capabilities ([Hodge et al., 2019](#); [Reupert, 2019](#)). This paper focuses on the significance of inclusive education and the specific challenges faced by teachers when Islamic Religious Education teaching to children with special needs ([Aşlamacı & Kaymakcan, 2017](#)).

Islam places a strong emphasis on the obligation to pursue education for all individuals, including children with special needs ([Mardyanasari, 2020](#)). However, it is important to recognize that these children possess extraordinary advantages that others may not possess, although not everyone is able to acknowledge and accept these unique qualities ([Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020](#)). They constitute a significant part of society that deserves liberation and empowerment ([Reupert, 2019](#)). Consequently, when a child is identified as having a disability, the implementation of special education becomes necessary. Special education encompasses a tailored learning program that is specifically designed to address the unique requirements of each individual student.

The implementation of learning in special education presents inherent difficulties, particularly when it comes to teaching Islamic Religious Education to children with special needs ([Almuhajir, 2020](#)). Teaching Islamic Religious Education is more challenging compared to teaching other subjects due to the comprehensive nature of instruction. In addition to focusing on nurturing students' personal character, instruction also encompasses the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of students ([Sari et al., 2022](#)). This multi-faceted approach adds to the complexity and presents a formidable challenge for teachers when delivering Islamic Religious Education lessons ([Demirel Ucan & Wright, 2019](#)). The difficulty is amplified in inclusive classrooms where students with diverse needs are present. One can easily imagine the arduous task faced by teachers in establishing an inclusive learning environment and effectively conducting teaching and learning activities ([Wardhani et al., 2020](#)). Undoubtedly, teacher professionalism is paramount in such circumstances, and adequate preparation is necessary to navigate the challenges effectively ([Brownlee et al., 2012](#); [Limon & Aydin, 2020](#)).

In order to facilitate islamic religious education learning for students with special needs, islamic religious education teachers must employ their own methods, approaches, and strategies that cater to the unique requirements of these students ([Ahmad, 2021](#)). Furthermore, it is essential that the learning process is supported by adequate facilities, both in terms of school infrastructure and classroom resources ([Besnoy et al., 2012](#)). Dealing with children with special needs requires a distinct approach compared to normal children, acknowledging their specific challenges and adapting teaching methodologies accordingly ([Douglas et al., 2016](#); [Kusumawardhani, 2017](#)).

Through observations and interviews conducted with teachers at Aneuk Naggroe Lhokseumawe special school, it was revealed that the current education provided in terms of faith, Sharia, and ethical issues is not entirely effective due to insufficient time allocated for islamic religious education instruction. Moreover, teachers often encounter obstacles such as students being reluctant to actively

participate during question-and-answer sessions, lacking the confidence to express their thoughts and feelings openly ([Daga, 2020](#); [Ekaningrum et al., 2018](#)). Building upon these findings, this study aims to examine in-depth the learning process employed by teachers in Islamic Religious Education at SLB Negeri Aneuk Naggroe Lhokseumawe.

Research on islamic religious education learning for children with special needs can significantly improve educators' knowledge of how to provide effective and inclusive instruction in this domain ([Atika, 2014](#)). The research endeavors to identify and evaluate various teaching methods suitable for children with special needs in the context of islamic religious education. This may encompass visual and interactive media, as well as project-based learning approaches ([Winne & Nesbit, 2010](#)). Additionally, the research aims to determine the specific training requirements for teachers to effectively deliver Islamic religious education to children with special needs ([Rumianowska, 2020](#)). By conducting research on islamic religious education learning for children with special needs, inclusive learning environments can be fostered, ensuring that every child has equal access to learning and development opportunities based on his or her individual requirements.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research conducted for this study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, with the research location being at Aneu Nanggroe in Lhokseumawe City special school. To ensure data reliability and validity, a triangulation of data collection techniques was employed, including observation, in-depth interviews, and document studies ([Arikunto, 2019](#); [Sugiyono, 2020](#)). Furthermore, data source triangulation was implemented by seeking consistent information from multiple sources. The data sources for this study included the school principal, class teachers, and teachers. Triangulation serves as a data validity test, providing researchers with confidence that the data has been corroborated across different sources, methods, theories, and researchers at various points in time ([Moleong, 2019](#)). Following data collection, the gathered data were subjected to analysis utilizing Huberman and Saldana's data analysis stages, which involve data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions ([Huberman & J, 2014](#)). These analytical procedures were employed to ensure a systematic and rigorous examination of the data, allowing for the extraction of meaningful insights and the formulation of valid conclusions based on the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Importance of Inclusive Education and Understanding Special Education

Inclusive education acknowledges the diverse learning needs of students and strives to create an environment that promotes their overall development. It

recognizes that children with special needs have extraordinary advantages that can contribute to society if properly supported and empowered. Inclusive education fosters social integration, promotes empathy, and prepares students for a diverse and inclusive society.

Special education refers to individualized educational programs designed to meet the specific requirements of each student with a disability. Due to the complexity of the subject matter and the need to simultaneously address cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, Islamic religious education instruction requires special education. Special education ensures that children with special needs receive the necessary assistance and accommodations to promote their learning and personal development. Challenges in Islamic religious education teaching to Children with Special Needs. The multidimensional nature of Islamic religious education instruction, which includes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor components, necessitates a comprehensive instructional strategy. Moreover, in an inclusive classroom, teachers must cultivate an inclusive and conducive learning environment while addressing the specific needs of each student. This requires meticulous planning, individualized instruction, and ongoing assessment and modification.

Teacher Professionalism and Preparation

Effective teaching of Islamic religious education in inclusive classrooms necessitates teacher professionalism and adequate preparation. Teachers should possess a deep understanding of both Islamic religious education and the diverse needs of children with special needs. Professional development programs, specialized training, and ongoing support are essential for teachers to enhance their skills and competencies in accommodating the learning needs of students with disabilities.

Several effective teaching methods can be implemented to facilitate the learning of Islamic religious education for children with special needs. These methods have been found to enhance their comprehension and engagement in religious concepts. The following methods have proven to be particularly beneficial:

- (1) Visual methods: Children with special needs often respond well to visual stimuli. Utilizing visual media, such as pictures, videos, or slide presentations, can assist these children in better understanding religious concepts, thereby improving their learning experience.
- (2) Interactive methods: Interactive teaching approaches, including games, simulations, and group discussions, can effectively engage children with special needs in the learning process. Such methods promote their active participation, comprehension, and the development of social and communication skills.
- (3) Project methods: Project-based teaching strategies provide children with special needs the opportunity to apply religious concepts in practical contexts. This

method encourages the development of cognitive and creative skills while fostering an understanding of how religious principles relate to everyday life.

- (4) Use of technology: Integrating technology, such as educational apps, games, or online learning platforms, can enhance the interactive and engaging nature of Islamic religious education for children with special needs. Technological tools can cater to their individual learning styles and preferences.
- (5) Multisensory approach: Employing a multisensory teaching approach is highly beneficial for children with special needs. By incorporating various sensory stimuli, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements, this method helps these children better grasp and retain religious concepts ([Douglas et al., 2016](#); [Lee et al., 2015](#); [Shepherd et al., 2016](#)).

In the context of Islamic education, effective teaching methods for children with special needs must be tailored to their specific requirements. They must accommodate a variety of special requirements, such as autism, deafness, and learning disabilities. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge and resolve individual differences while actively involving these children in the learning process. By embracing inclusive practices and individualized approaches, educators can foster the spiritual development of children with special needs in a supportive and enriching environment.

According to Rock, learning is a purposeful and planned activity that aims to foster student engagement and achievement of specific goals ([Aşlamacı & Kaymakcan, 2017](#); [Rock et al., 2016](#)). It involves a process that seeks to bring about changes in students' cognitive (knowledge), psychological (attitudes and behaviors), emotional (perspective), and psychomotor (skills) domains. This process encompasses various teacher-led activities, including planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up, all of which occur within an educational setting, primarily in the context of teaching. Islamic religious education is a form of education that strives to mold individuals in accordance with the divine guidelines of Allah, with the ultimate purpose of fulfilling Allah's commands ([Duryat, 2021](#); [Umar, 2020](#)). It is characterized by two key aspects: (1) the goal of shaping each individual into a complete person (kamil) as prescribed by the Qur'an, and (2) the essence of education lies in the teachings of God as outlined in the Qur'an, which are then applied to everyday life, following the example set by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The primary objective of Islamic religious education is to produce individuals who are not only deeply connected to their faith but also contribute positively to society. They should possess the ability to implement and develop Islamic teachings in their interactions with God (Hablun minallāh) and fellow human beings (ḥablun minan nās), thereby benefitting both the present world and the afterlife ([Halim, 2017](#); [Rahmah et al., 2022](#)).

Hence, the process of Islamic religious education teachers learning involves educators' efforts to understand their students and effectively transmit Islamic religious knowledge through various teaching approaches, methods, and strategies. The utilization of appropriate approaches, models, and learning strategies is imperative for Islamic religious education teachers to create an environment that fosters students' enthusiasm and facilitates their acceptance and assimilation of the knowledge and education being imparted.

Implementing inclusive education for children with special needs is crucial in ensuring their equitable participation. According to [Sarwono \(2010\)](#), inclusive education is based on the fundamental principle that all children should be able to learn together, irrespective of their difficulties or differences. It entails an educational system that promotes the inclusion of children with special needs in regular classrooms, alongside their peers. At Aneuk Naggroe Lhokseumawe special school, inclusive education is practiced in the context of Islamic religious education teaching. Each child's needs are considered, ensuring they receive an optimal education through various modifications and adjustments. These adaptations encompass the curriculum, infrastructure, teaching, and education personnel, learning systems, and assessment methods.

The learning process is specifically tailored to meet the unique requirements of children with disabilities. The curriculum and material competencies are modified to suit their needs. Emphasis is placed on minimizing reliance on imitation and demonstration learning methods, as well as abstract materials. Teachers employ inquiry strategies and utilize concrete objects, word cards, hijaiyah letters, braille letters, and other supportive tools to enhance the learning experience for these students. Evaluation of Islamic education learning outcomes for children with disabilities is conducted through various assessments, such as home activities, worship practices, midterm exams, and semester exams. The Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM) values are adjusted to accommodate the specific needs of each child.

By implementing inclusive practices and making appropriate modifications, Negeri Aneuk Naggroe Lhokseumawe special school ensures that children with special needs access meaningful and effective learning experiences. This inclusive approach promotes their active participation, fosters their growth, and supports their overall development.

Teachers' Efforts and Roles in the Teaching and Learning Process of Islamic Religious Education for Children with Special Needs

Teachers play a pivotal role in the learning process and determine its success or failure. Prior to implementing the learning activities, it is essential to design a comprehensive learning plan that serves as a guide for teachers, facilitating effective

teaching and learning. Therefore, the learning design for Islamic religious education at Aneuk Naggroe Lhokseumawe State Special School follows a similar framework to that of mainstream schools, but with necessary modifications to cater to the specific needs of the students.

Teachers serve as surrogate parents in the educational journey of students, bearing the responsibility of carrying out this crucial role. The teacher's involvement significantly influences the achievement of learning objectives ([Hazmi, 2019](#); [Mutiaramses et al., 2021](#)). In working with students with disabilities, teachers are required to employ diverse methods and media tailored to the specific conditions and needs of these students. Interviews with Islamic religious education teachers and class teachers revealed that the methods of repetition, imitation, and demonstration are commonly employed in the learning process.

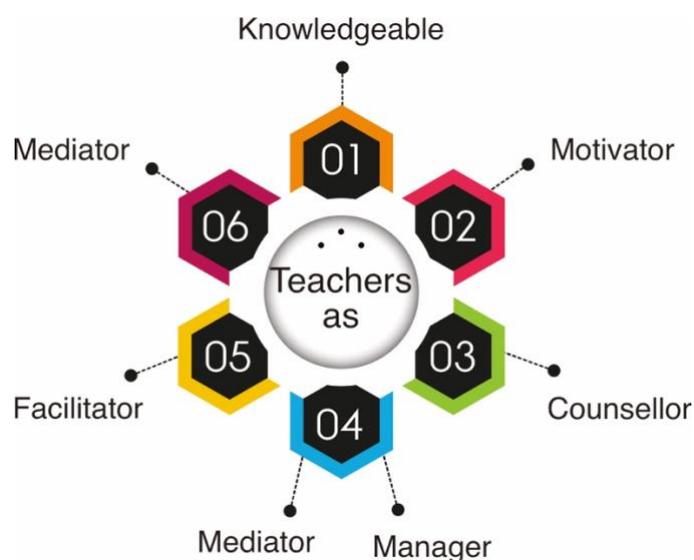


Figure 1: Islamic religious education teachers role to children with special needs

Figure 1 describes Islamic religious education teachers encompasses cognitive aspects but also affective and psychomotor aspects. Consequently, the role of teachers working with students with disabilities can be described based on data collected from interviews and literature studies.

- (a) *Firstly*, Teachers are knowledgeable educators who can effectively impart knowledge and comprehension to students. Teachers must align their words and actions as role models.
- (b) *Secondly*, teachers act as motivators, inspiring and stimulating students to develop their motivation to engage in learning activities.
- (c) *Thirdly*, teachers function as guides, helping students explore their potentials, accomplish their developmental tasks, and develop into ideal human beings.
- (d) *Fourthly*, teachers act as organizers, creating a conducive learning environment and climate by effectively managing the classroom.

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- (e) *Fifthly*, teachers serve as facilitators, providing students with valuable learning resources to achieve the learning objectives.
 - (f) *Sixthly*, teachers act as mediators, selecting appropriate media and learning tools to effectively, efficiently, and engagingly convey the learning materials. Lastly, teachers serve as evaluators, objectively assessing students' progress and accomplishments in various activities.

The multifaceted role of teachers in inclusive schools emphasizes their significance in shaping the learning experiences of students with disabilities and ensuring their educational success. Efforts to create effective learning for children with special needs require comprehensive teacher training to ensure the provision of effective Islamic Religious Education for these children. The training should encompass various aspects, including:

Firstly, teachers need to acquire knowledge about different types of special needs. A solid understanding of conditions such as autism, deafness, and other learning disabilities enables teachers to effectively address and accommodate these specific needs within the learning environment.

Secondly, teachers should receive training in inclusive teaching methods. It is crucial to equip educators with strategies that promote inclusivity and ensure that every child feels valued and included in the learning process. This entails employing diverse teaching approaches to cater to individual needs and accommodating different types of special needs.

Thirdly, teachers should be familiar with educational technology and its applications. Proficiency in utilizing educational apps and online learning platforms empowers teachers to create interactive and engaging learning experiences for children with special needs, enhancing their participation and understanding.

Fourthly, teachers must possess a deep understanding of religious concepts. A strong grasp of the content being taught allows teachers to present the material in a clear and accessible manner, ensuring that children with special needs can comprehend and engage with the teachings effectively.

Fifthly, effective communication skills are vital for teachers working with children with special needs. They must be adept at communicating in ways that resonate with each child, employing strategies that foster engagement and motivation. Good communication skills facilitate a supportive and responsive learning environment.

It is crucial to tailor the training provided to teachers based on their individual needs and the specific types and levels of special needs present in the classroom. Additionally, training should be ongoing to enable teachers to continuously improve their skills and knowledge in delivering effective Islamic religious education to children with special needs.

Overall, comprehensive and tailored teacher training programs serve as a foundation for enhancing the quality of Islamic religious education for children with special needs, promoting their inclusive learning experiences and overall development.

Supporting Factors for Islamic Religious Education Learning at Aneuk Naggroe Lhokseumawe State Special Needs School

The support factors contributing to the success of learning Islamic Religious Education at Aneuk Naggroe Lhokseumawe State Special Needs School can be classified into two categories that generate high motivation, enthusiasm, and interest among the students. The first category is the internal environment, encompassing the teachers, facilities, and services provided by the school. While not all Islamic education teachers and other disability teachers possess a background in special education for children with special needs, their patient and empathetic demeanor creates a harmonious familial atmosphere. Moreover, the school is equipped with disability-friendly facilities and infrastructure, ensuring easy access and meeting the diverse needs of the students. Additional services such as health units and counseling units further enhance the support system within the school.

The second category is the external environment, involving parents, the community, and the education office. These external factors consistently support the programs of the special needs school. The support primarily manifests through the active participation of external parties in educational development. Parents and community members willingly serve as guest teachers, providing valuable contributions to Islamic religious education teachers (ustadz) are also invited to deliver religious lectures to the students, enriching their spiritual growth. Furthermore, the education office plays a significant role in meeting the school's educational development needs. They offer assistance, supervision, and facilitate the implementation of various programs at school.

The combined support from both the internal and external environments ensures a conducive and empowering atmosphere for learning Islamic Religious Education. The commitment and collaboration among teachers, the provision of disability-friendly facilities, the availability of essential services, the active involvement of parents and the community, and the support from the education office collectively contribute to the success of the students' educational journey at the special needs school.

Inhibiting Factors of Islamic Religious Education Learning at Aneuk Naggroe Lhokseumawe State Special Needs School

In the implementation of activities various obstacles are encountered. These hindrances affect the learning process of Islamic Religious Education, and they

include several factors. *Firstly*, the students face challenges due to their mental, physical, and intellectual deficiencies. These limitations make it more difficult for them to engage fully in the learning activities. *Secondly*, there is a shortage with only two teachers available. This leads to a less-than-ideal teacher-student ratio, as each teacher must handle the learning process alone. Ideally, multiple teachers should be assigned to each class to ensure effective instruction and support.

Thirdly, the academic background of the Islamic Religious Education teachers is not specialized in special education. The teachers at Aneuk Naggroe Lhokseumawe State Special School have graduated from the Faculty of Tarbiyah Islamic Religious Education Study Program, which limits their ability to interact with students flexibly. It is crucial to enhance the teachers' capacity in dealing with and interacting with students with special needs through training, seminars, and similar activities. These initiatives will help enrich their knowledge and experience in catering to the unique requirements of their students.

Fourthly, time allocation is challenging as the Islamic Religious Education learning schedule in special needs schools is often combined. Due to the limited number of teachers, it is common for the elementary school students to receive less attention and focus because the teachers' schedules are shared with junior high school and high school students. *Fifthly*, communication difficulties hinder the learning of Islamic Religious Education. Students with special needs find it challenging to accept, comprehend, and retain the lessons delivered to them. Their limited ability to think abstractly and weak memory capacity contribute to their struggles with social communication. Despite these obstacles, it is crucial to recognize and address them proactively. Efforts should be made to provide additional support, training, and resources to the teachers, improve time management and scheduling, and implement strategies to enhance communication and comprehension skills among the students. By doing so, the learning experience in Islamic Religious Education can be optimized, and the students' educational journey can be more inclusive and fulfilling.

Internal and external environments are both supportive factors for Islamic religious education teachers. Internally, a supportive and harmonious atmosphere among teachers, as well as the availability of appropriate facilities and services, contribute to a conducive learning environment. Externally, the programs implemented at Aneuk Naggroe Lhokseumawe State Special Needs School are consistently supported by parents, the community, and education agencies.

On the other hand, there are impediments to learning that pose difficulties. For starters, students with special needs face challenges due to mental, physical and intellectual limitations. Second, due to the scarcity of Islamic religious education teachers in special needs schools, the teacher-student ratio is unfavorable. More teachers should ideally be available to ensure optimal instruction. Third, Islamic

religious education teachers' academic background may not include specialized training in special education.. This constraint limits their ability to interact with students in an adaptable manner. To address this, it is critical to provide professional development opportunities, such as training, seminars, and other similar activities, to help teachers improve their knowledge and experience.

Furthermore, time allocation is a challenge because the Islamic education learning schedule is frequently combined, resulting in the neglect of Islamic education for elementary students due to shared schedules with junior high and high school students. Finally, communication barriers impede the learning process. Due to limited abstract thinking abilities and weak memory capacities, students with special needs find it difficult to receive, comprehend, and retain the lessons delivered.

CONCLUSION

The learning process modified to meet the specific needs of children with special needs in schools that cater to them and reflected in the curriculum and material competencies, which are tailored to meet the needs of children with special needs. The methods of instruction employed emphasize imitation and demonstration while avoiding using abstract materials. Islamic religious education teachers use inquiry strategies and various supporting tools such as concrete objects, word cards, hijaiyah letters, braille letters, and other resources to enhance the learning experience. Home activities, worship practices, midterm exams, and semester exams assess Islamic religious education learning outcomes for children with special needs, with the Minimum Completeness Criteria adjusted to each child.

The role of the teacher in the process of Islamic religious education is multifaceted. Teachers serve as inspirers, motivators, organizers, managers, mediators, facilitators, and evaluators in place of parents. Their involvement in these various roles enhances teaching and learning activities, resulting in improved outcomes. However, teachers' effectiveness in facilitating the learning process is influenced by both supportive and inhibiting factors. Addressing the challenges and capitalizing on the strengths can improve the learning experience for children with special needs in Islamic religious education, promoting their educational development and overall well-being. Inclusive education is critical for empowering special-needs children and ensuring their active participation in society. Teaching to special needs children necessitates a comprehensive and adaptive approach that addresses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. We can create inclusive learning environments that allow children with special needs to thrive academically, emotionally, and spiritually by recognizing the challenges and investing in teacher professionalism and preparation.

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