BUSTANUL ULUM JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION
Volume 4 Issue 1 June 2026
P-ISSN 2988-5779, E-ISSN 2988-1994

Humanizing Islamic Education for Autistic Children: A Case Study at State Special Schools

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Article History:
Received: February 02, 2026
Revised: April 24, 2026
Accepted: May, 31 2026

Keywords:
humanizing Islamic education; autism spectrum disorder; inclusive education; Islamic religious education; special schools

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of humanizing Islamic education for autistic children at Sri Soedewi Masjchun Sofwan State Special School. The study was motivated by the tendency of Islamic Religious Education to prioritize cognitive achievement while overlooking students emotional and psychological needs. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation involving Islamic education teachers, assistant teachers, and parents of autistic students. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that humanizing Islamic education was implemented through compassionate interaction, adaptive communication, emotional sensitivity, visual instruction, and repetitive learning strategies. Emotional comfort emerged as a prerequisite for students engagement in religious learning activities. Environmental and physiological factors, including dietary patterns, also influenced students concentration and classroom behavior. Despite these challenges, autistic students were able to participate in prayer practice, Qur'anic recitation, and religious habituation through patient guidance and collaboration between teachers and parents. This study is limited to one state special school and may not represent other inclusive educational settings

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a central concern in contemporary educational discourse, particularly regarding the fulfillment of educational rights for children with special needs. Educational institutions are increasingly expected not only to ensure equal access to learning but also to create environments that respect learner diversity and respond to individual characteristics. Within Islamic education contexts in Indonesia, this expectation has grown stronger as national inclusive education policies have expanded the mandate for schools to accommodate students with various disabilities, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Wahyudi & Kristiawan, 2017; Aryani et al., 2025).

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by persistent limitations in communication, social interaction, emotional regulation, and behavioral adaptation. These characteristics frequently affect autistic children's participation in classroom learning, including Islamic Religious Education (IRE). In

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.62448/bujie.v4i1.600

practice, many autistic students encounter difficulties in understanding abstract religious concepts, following collective worship activities, and sustaining emotional engagement throughout the learning process. Such conditions indicate that conventional instructional approaches are often insufficient to meet autistic students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs, making it necessary for Islamic Religious Education to adopt more adaptive and inclusive practices (Rofiq, 2020; Hamdani et al., 2025).

International research on inclusive education for autistic students has consistently highlighted that meaningful inclusion extends well beyond physical placement in the same classroom demonstrated across multiple national contexts that inclusive education policies frequently face significant implementation gaps, particularly in teacher preparedness, resource adequacy, and institutional support systems (Armstrong et al., 2016). These gaps directly affect the quality of educational experiences for autistic students, who require not only modified curricula but also responsive and emotionally attuned learning environments (Saggers et al., 2016). Similarly found that the academic and emotional outcomes of autistic students were substantially shaped by teacher attitudes, peer relationships, and the extent to which school environments accommodated sensory and communicative differences. These findings establish that inclusive education for autistic learners demands systemic, relational, and instructional responsiveness simultaneously.

Research specifically examining the relational dimensions of inclusive education for autistic students has produced important findings regarding teacher-student interaction identified the quality of teacher-student relationships as one of the strongest predictors of academic engagement and emotional well-being among autistic students, with warm, consistent, and communicatively flexible teachers enabling substantially greater student participation and learning progress (Blacher et al., 2022). Further, it was found that autistic students consistently reported feelings of social isolation, anxiety, and misunderstanding in school environments, underscoring the need for emotionally supportive and relationally sensitive educational practices. These international findings are particularly relevant to Islamic educational settings, where teacher-student relationships are ethically grounded in principles of compassion, patience, and mutual respect, values that align closely with the relational needs of autistic learners.

Within Indonesian Islamic education, research has examined the implementation of inclusive practices across various school types. Fahrurrosi et. al. (2025) investigated inclusive school management in Indonesian Islamic educational institutions, finding that schools with structured collaborative frameworks among teachers, special education coordinators, and families produced more consistent and effective accommodations for students with disabilities. Syafei (2021) further analyzed inclusive education policy implementation in Indonesian Islamic schools, identifying persistent gaps between ministerial regulations and actual classroom-level practice, especially in the provision of trained special education personnel, appropriate learning materials, and individualized planning for students with autism and other disabilities. These structural deficiencies create conditions in which teachers must navigate significant pedagogical challenges largely through personal initiative and improvisation rather than systematic institutional support.

Studies focused on Islamic Religious Education for students with special needs have addressed both instructional adaptation and pedagogical approaches. Wardhani & Khadavi (2025) investigated IRE implementation for students with intellectual disabilities in Indonesian inclusive schools, revealing that teachers frequently lacked specialized competencies in adaptive religious instruction, resulting in inconsistent

accommodation of diverse learner needs. Their study emphasized that effective adaptive religious education requires not only modified materials but also teacher proficiency in empathetic communication and student-centered instructional design. Rofiq (2020) similarly found that the use of visual and multisensory instructional media in IRE for students with special needs in Indonesian special schools significantly enhanced students' comprehension of inherently abstract religious concepts, demonstrating that thoughtful material adaptation can substantially improve religious learning outcomes for students with developmental differences.

Research on differentiated and adaptive instructional strategies within Islamic Religious Education has further contributed to understanding effective inclusive pedagogical practices. Syaidah et al., (2025) examined differentiated instructional strategies in IRE across inclusive primary schools in Indonesia, concluding that teachers who employed visual learning media, simplified language, structured repetition, and concrete learning experiences demonstrated markedly higher effectiveness in facilitating religious understanding among students with cognitive and developmental differences, including autistic students. Adiyono et al., (2025) investigated inclusive pedagogical strategies implemented by Islamic education teachers in heterogeneous classrooms, finding that adaptive communication strategies, flexible assessment approaches, and individualized learning pathways were associated with superior outcomes for students with special educational needs across cognitive, emotional, and religious dimensions. These findings collectively indicate that instructional flexibility and responsiveness to individual learner characteristics are essential competencies for teachers implementing IRE in inclusive and special educational settings.

The role of family engagement and institutional collaboration in supporting religious education for autistic children has also received scholarly attention within Indonesian research contexts. Shurr et al., (2023) explored parental perspectives on inclusive Islamic education for children with developmental disabilities, finding that family engagement was critical to reinforcing religious learning at home and ensuring continuity between school-based instruction and home religious practices. Families of autistic children, in particular, reported that clear school-home communication about adaptive strategies was essential for their children's religious and spiritual development. Strogilos & Tragoulia (2013) examined collaborative relationships between teachers and parents of children with special needs, finding that schools with structured family partnership programs demonstrated significantly stronger inclusive educational outcomes, including improvements in students' religious practice participation and emotional adjustment in school environments.

More recent scholarship has begun to address the humanizing and value-based dimensions of Islamic education for students with disabilities. Hasanah & Sukiman (2025) examined humanistic and differentiated learning strategies within inclusive Islamic elementary education, finding that teachers who integrated differentiated instruction with humanistic relational approaches demonstrated greater effectiveness in supporting students with special needs, including those on the autism spectrum. Nurhasanah et al., (2025) explored value-based Islamic education management models in inclusive schools, highlighting that alignment between Islamic ethical principles and inclusive educational practices created more supportive learning environments for students with disabilities. Investigated the experiences of Islamic Religious Education teachers in special schools, finding that teachers relied heavily on experiential knowledge and personal ethical commitment rather than formal adaptive training, revealing critical gaps in teacher preparation for inclusive religious education in special school environments.

Research on the emotional and spiritual dimensions of education for autistic students has gained growing attention in recent years. Schumacher et al., (2019) conducted a systematic review of spirituality and autism, finding that religious and spiritual engagement could provide autistic individuals with meaningful sources of comfort, identity, and community belonging when accommodations were intentionally and thoughtfully designed. However, they also found that poorly accommodated religious environments could exacerbate anxiety, sensory difficulties, and social exclusion for autistic individuals. These findings are directly relevant to Indonesian Islamic educational settings, where communal religious participation, ritual practice, and abstract doctrinal understanding constitute core components of IRE curricula, creating both significant challenges and meaningful opportunities for autistic students' religious engagement.

Collectively, the existing body of research demonstrates several consistent findings relevant to inclusive Islamic Religious Education for students with special needs. First, studies identify teacher competencies, relational approaches, and emotional attunement as decisive factors in the quality of inclusive educational experiences for autistic students. Second, research emphasizes that adaptive instructional materials, modified assessment practices, and individualized educational planning are essential prerequisites for effective inclusive IRE. Third, scholars have highlighted the importance of institutional structures, administrative support, resource provision, and family partnerships in sustaining inclusive educational outcomes. Fourth, emerging studies have begun to recognize the significance of humanizing, compassionate, and value-grounded relational approaches within Islamic religious education for students with disabilities.

However, a critical review of the existing literature reveals significant gaps that remain inadequately addressed. Previous studies predominantly focus on curriculum adaptation, instructional strategies, classroom management, and inclusive educational models in broad or general contexts, frequently treating autistic children as one undifferentiated subgroup within the wider category of students with special needs, without examining the distinctive educational, relational, and spiritual needs of autistic learners within Islamic Religious Education settings specifically. Limited scholarly attention has been devoted to the implementation of humanizing Islamic education for autistic children in state special schools, where the concentration of students with autism creates both distinctive challenges and particular opportunities for developing compassionate and adaptive religious educational practices. Existing research rarely examines the nuanced dimensions of compassionate teacher-student interaction, emotional sensitivity in religious instruction, adaptive religious language and concept modification, and the relational processes through which autistic students are supported to engage meaningfully with Islamic religious content. The emotional and humane dimensions of Islamic educational interaction between teachers and autistic students remain insufficiently explored within contemporary Islamic education research, representing a significant gap in understanding how Islamic values of compassion, patience, and human dignity are enacted within the practical realities of daily religious education for autistic children in special school settings.

The novelty of this study lies in its focused examination of humanizing Islamic education through adaptive and emotionally supportive religious learning practices specifically for autistic children in a state special school environment. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize instructional and managerial aspects of inclusive Islamic education, this research foregrounds the emotional, relational, and humane dimensions of Islamic educational interaction between teachers and autistic students. This study was conducted at Sri Soedewi Masjchun Sofwan State Special School and aims to explore the

implementation of humanizing Islamic education for autistic children, specifically investigating adaptive Islamic Religious Education practices, challenges encountered during the learning process, and strategies employed by teachers to support students' religious, emotional, and social development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to examine the implementation of humanizing Islamic education for autistic students at SLB Negeri Sri Soedewi Masjchun Sofwan Jambi. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows researchers to understand educational phenomena contextually within natural settings and to interpret participants' experiences comprehensively (Creswell & Poth, 2021). The case study design was considered appropriate because this research focused specifically on adaptive Islamic Religious Education practices for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in a particular special school environment. Through this approach, the study explored emotional interaction, adaptive learning practices, visual instruction, and compassionate educational strategies implemented during Islamic Religious Education activities.

The research was conducted at SLB Negeri Sri Soedewi Masjchun Sofwan Jambi, a state special school providing educational services for students with various disabilities, including Autism Spectrum Disorder. The participant in this study was selected purposively based on direct involvement in teaching autistic students. The primary participant was Ibu Mardiana, S.Pd.I., an Islamic Religious Education teacher responsible for conducting religious learning activities for autistic students. Purposive sampling was applied because qualitative research prioritizes participants who possess relevant experience and rich information related to the phenomenon being investigated (Patton, 2020).

The data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through interviews and classroom observation involving the Islamic Religious Education teacher. Secondary data were derived from field notes and documentation related to learning activities during the research process. Documentation included classroom learning records and several photographs of Islamic Religious Education activities involving autistic students. These supporting data were used to strengthen observational findings concerning classroom interaction, students' emotional responses, and adaptive instructional practices.

Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain detailed information regarding teachers' experiences, adaptive learning strategies, emotional interaction with autistic students, and challenges encountered during Islamic Religious Education activities. The interview process was conducted flexibly to allow participants to explain their experiences openly and naturally. Observation was conducted directly during Islamic Religious Education activities involving autistic students. The observation focused on teacher student interaction, classroom atmosphere, students emotional responses, adaptive communication, and learning participation during religious instruction. During classroom observation, several autistic students appeared more engaged when teachers implemented calm verbal communication, visual demonstrations, and repetitive prayer guidance. Some students initially demonstrated unstable emotional responses and limited interaction, yet gradually became calmer after teachers approached them patiently and emotionally. These findings indicate that emotional

security and compassionate communication played important roles in facilitating meaningful religious learning for autistic students.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing adapted from (Miles et al., 2020). Thematic analysis was selected because it enables researchers to identify, analyze, and interpret recurring themes systematically within qualitative data. Recent qualitative studies also emphasize that thematic analysis provides a rigorous and flexible framework for interpreting educational and social experiences within qualitative inquiry. Initially, the researcher organized and reduced the data by selecting information relevant to the research focus. Subsequently, the data were categorized into several themes, including emotional interaction, adaptive learning, visual instruction, emotional sensitivity, and compassionate educational practices. The interpretation process was conducted by connecting empirical findings with recent discussions concerning humanistic education and inclusive learning for children with special needs.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied triangulation techniques through interviews, observation, and documentation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2021). The researcher also conducted member checking by reconfirming interview findings with the participant to maintain interpretive accuracy and strengthen data credibility. These procedures were intended to ensure that the findings accurately represented the educational realities experienced during Islamic Religious Education activities for autistic students within the special school environment.

This study complied with ethical research principles. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their identities and personal information were kept confidential. Participation was voluntary, and all data were used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the implementation of humanizing Islamic education for autistic students at SLB Negeri Sri Soedewi Masjchun Sofwan Jambi through interviews with an Islamic Religious Education teacher and supporting documentation of learning activities. The findings demonstrate that emotional support, adaptive learning, compassionate communication, and visual instructional strategies played important roles in facilitating Islamic Religious Education (IRE) for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The discussion integrates the research findings with previous studies from recent reputable journals in order to explain the implications of the findings within the context of inclusive Islamic education.

Humanistic Interaction in Islamic Religious Education

The findings revealed that emotional interaction became an important aspect of Islamic Religious Education for autistic students. According to the informant, autistic students often required emotional stabilization before participating in classroom learning activities. Teachers therefore attempted to create calm and supportive classroom interaction before introducing religious materials. Emotional approaches were considered more effective than directly forcing students to follow instructional activities when their emotional condition was unstable. Ibu Mardiana explained: "Before starting the lesson, teachers usually try to calm the students first because some students cannot immediately focus on learning activities when their emotional condition is unstable" (Mardiana, Interview, 2025).

This finding indicates that emotional comfort became an important prerequisite for autistic students participation during religious learning activities. Several students demonstrated fluctuating emotional responses, repetitive behavior, limited concentration, and difficulties maintaining attention during classroom learning. Under such conditions, teachers attempted to reduce emotional pressure through patient interaction and supportive communication. These findings are consistent with recent studies on humanistic and learner-centered education emphasizing the importance of emotional security and supportive educational environments in facilitating meaningful learning processes. Humanistic educational perspectives view learners as individuals whose emotional, psychological, and social dimensions should be nurtured alongside intellectual development (Joseph, 2021). Emotionally supportive interaction therefore becomes highly important for students with special needs, particularly autistic students who frequently experience difficulties in communication and emotional regulation.

The findings also align with learner-centered educational approaches emphasizing empathy, respect, and meaningful interpersonal relationships between teachers and students (Msonde, 2023). In this study, teachers did not merely function as instructors delivering religious material but also as emotional companions who patiently guided autistic students throughout the learning process. Such interaction reflects compassionate pedagogy in which emotional understanding becomes part of educational practice.

Previous studies similarly indicate that emotionally supportive learning environments positively influence inclusive educational practices. Hasanah & Sukiman (2025) found that differentiated and humanistic learning approaches strengthened inclusive education by recognizing students individual characteristics and emotional conditions. Likewise, Patty, Prastowo, et al., (2024) argued that compassionate educational interaction contributed positively to students confidence and participation within inclusive Islamic educational settings. In the context of Islamic education, these findings also reflect educational values emphasizing compassion, respect, and humane treatment toward learners regardless of their limitations. Humanizing Islamic education therefore involves not only the transmission of religious knowledge but also emotional support and respectful interaction throughout the educational process.

Adaptive Learning and Emotional Sensitivity

The findings further demonstrated that adaptive learning became an important strategy in facilitating Islamic Religious Education for autistic students. According to the informant, teachers continuously adjusted instructional methods according to students emotional conditions, concentration levels, and behavioral responses during classroom learning activities. Ibu Mardiana explained: “Some students become more emotionally sensitive in certain situations. Therefore, teachers must be patient and cannot force the learning process immediately” (Mardiana, Interview, 2025).

This finding indicates that autistic students emotional conditions significantly influenced their participation during Islamic Religious Education activities. Consequently, emotional sensitivity became an important consideration within the learning process. These findings support recent discussions regarding differentiated and learner-centered educational practices emphasizing instructional flexibility according to students individual learning characteristics (Li et al., 2021). Adaptive educational approaches are particularly important for autistic students because Autism Spectrum Disorder is characterized by difficulties in communication, emotional regulation, social interaction, and behavioral adaptation (Association, 2022).

Within classroom settings, autistic students frequently demonstrate diverse emotional responses and learning patterns. Therefore, rigid instructional practices may create emotional discomfort and reduce students participation during learning activities. The findings of this study indicate that flexible and emotionally supportive educational interaction contributed positively to autistic students engagement during Islamic Religious Education. Recent studies also emphasize that learner-centered educational approaches strengthen students participation by creating inclusive and psychologically supportive learning environments (Oyelana et al., 2022). In the context of special education, emotionally adaptive instruction enables teachers to respond more effectively to autistic students behavioral and emotional conditions.

The findings additionally demonstrate that emotional understanding and patience became important pedagogical competencies for teachers working with autistic students. Teachers attempted to implement compassionate educational interaction by prioritizing students emotional readiness before continuing instructional activities. Such practices indicate that the success of Islamic Religious Education should not be measured solely through cognitive achievement but also through students emotional comfort and willingness to participate during learning activities.

Visual Instruction and Repetitive Religious Learning

Another important finding revealed that visual instruction and repetitive learning strategies significantly supported autistic students participation during Islamic Religious Education activities. According to the informant, autistic students tended to understand religious practices more easily when teachers provided direct demonstrations repeatedly rather than abstract verbal explanations. Ibu Mardiana explained: "Autistic students usually understand more easily when teachers provide direct examples repeatedly because some students have difficulty understanding abstract explanations." (Mardiana, Interview, 2025).

Religious learning activities such as prayer practice and Qur'anic recitation were therefore taught through visual demonstration, imitation, and repeated instructional guidance. Teachers attempted to guide students gradually through direct examples of prayer movements, sitting positions, and recitation practices. These findings indicate that visual and experiential learning strategies became highly important within Islamic Religious Education for autistic students. Research on autism within educational contexts explains that autistic students frequently experience difficulties understanding symbolic language and abstract verbal instruction, thereby requiring adaptive and visually oriented learning approaches (Lane & Menzies, 2014). Previous studies similarly found that visual demonstrations, emotional support, and repetitive instruction positively influenced autistic students participation during religious learning activities (Raharja, 2024). Visual learning strategies therefore function not only as instructional techniques but also as supportive educational approaches enabling autistic students to participate more comfortably during classroom learning activities.

The findings of this study additionally demonstrate that repetitive learning should not merely be interpreted as technical instruction. Repetition also functioned as compassionate educational interaction through which teachers patiently guided autistic students toward gradual participation in religious activities. Through repeated demonstration and emotional support, students became more willing to engage in prayer practice and Qur'anic recitation activities. These findings suggest that adaptive Islamic education for autistic students requires instructional flexibility, emotional sensitivity, and patient educational interaction. Learning success was therefore not solely measured

through students' cognitive mastery of religious concepts but also through their emotional comfort and gradual spiritual participation during classroom activities.

Humanizing Islamic Education as Compassionate Educational Practice

Overall, the findings demonstrate that humanizing Islamic education for autistic students involves more than adapting instructional techniques. The educational process also requires emotional understanding, compassionate communication, patience, and recognition of autistic students as individuals possessing dignity and learning potential. The findings indicate that autistic students remained capable of participating in religious learning activities when teachers implemented emotionally supportive and adaptive educational interaction. Through calm communication, visual instruction, repeated guidance, and patient interaction, students gradually participated in prayer practice and Qur'anic recitation activities.

Recent studies indicate that humanistic educational approaches contribute positively to inclusive educational environments because they emphasize empathy, emotional security, and individualized interaction between teachers and students (Joseph, 2021). Humanizing Islamic education therefore provides important opportunities for developing adaptive religious learning practices for autistic students within special education contexts. The findings also support previous discussions emphasizing that inclusive Islamic education should nurture students not only cognitively but also emotionally and socially (Patty, Rahim, et al., 2024). Compassionate educational interaction enabled autistic students to participate more confidently and comfortably during religious learning activities. This study therefore contributes to contemporary discussions regarding inclusive Islamic education by highlighting the importance of emotional understanding, adaptive pedagogy, and compassionate educational interaction for autistic students. Humanizing Islamic education becomes not merely an educational concept but also a practical ethical commitment to respecting learner diversity and human dignity within special education environments.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of humanizing Islamic education for autistic students at SLB Negeri Sri Soedewi Masjchun Sofwan Jambi was carried out through compassionate interaction, adaptive learning strategies, emotional sensitivity, and repetitive instructional practices during Islamic Religious Education activities. The findings demonstrate that autistic students require emotional comfort, patient guidance, visual instruction, and individualized approaches before actively participating in religious learning activities. Emotional security became an important prerequisite that enabled students to engage gradually in prayer practice, Qur'anic recitation, and daily religious habituation. The study also revealed that adaptive communication and empathetic teacher–student interaction played important roles in facilitating meaningful learning experiences for autistic students. During classroom activities, teachers implemented calm verbal communication, repeated demonstrations, and emotionally supportive approaches to help students maintain focus and participation. These findings indicate that Islamic education for autistic students should not merely emphasize cognitive achievement, but also prioritize emotional acceptance, dignity, and meaningful spiritual participation within the learning process.

This research contributes to the discourse of inclusive Islamic education by highlighting the importance of compassionate pedagogy and humanistic educational practices for children with special needs. The findings strengthen the perspective that adaptive Islamic Religious Education requires emotional understanding, flexibility, and

learner-centered interaction in supporting autistic students' educational and spiritual development. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education teachers are encouraged to develop more adaptive and emotionally responsive instructional approaches for autistic learners. Future studies are also recommended to explore broader dimensions of inclusive Islamic education involving different educational settings, disabilities, and sociocultural contexts.

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