

The Role of Teachers and Parents in Fostering and Supporting Inclusive Islamic Character Education for Autistic Students

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Abstract: Fair and equitable inclusive education is essential to ensure that all children, including those with special needs such as autism, have equal opportunities to develop and play a role in society. Religious activities such as congregational prayers, memorizing prayers, and getting used to Islamic etiquette can be a meaningful learning medium for autistic students. The synergy of the role of teachers as role models and parents as companions means that character education not only forms understanding, but also fosters feelings and directs autistic students' actions in a more Islamic and characterful direction. The Darul Fatonah Singocandi Kudus Foundation is one of the institutions that seeks to integrate Islamic character education with behavioral and communication therapy for autistic students. The inclusive concept applied emphasizes acceptance, respect for differences, and collaboration between teachers and parents. This study focuses on the contributions of teachers and parents in optimizing Islamic-based inclusive character education for autistic students at Yayasan Darul Fatonah Singocandi Kudus. The research employed fieldwork with a descriptive qualitative approach. The participants consisted of teacher and parents. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, and were further examined through data reduction, presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification using source triangulation. The findings that: The role of teachers and parents is crucial, with teachers serving as role models and facilitators who apply adaptive methods, while parents reinforce the internalization of Islamic values through habituation at home.

Keywords: Character Education for Autistic Students, Teachers, Parents.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental aspect in shaping an individual's character from an early age. In addition to developing intellectual intelligence, education also plays a role in developing moral values, ethics, and good character. Education is the primary foundation for developing a personality with integrity, noble morals, and the ability to contribute positively to social life. Every citizen has the same right to education without discrimination. Everyone has the right to receive the same treatment and education as stated in the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, Article 5 paragraph 2, which states that: "Citizens who have physical, emotional, mental, intellectual or social disabilities

have the right to receive special education."(2003 National Education System). Based on these provisions, children with autism have the same rights to receive an education that is appropriate, dignified, and according to their needs.

Autism or *Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)* Autistic children are a complex developmental disorder whose symptoms appear before the age of three. Children with autism experience difficulties in communication, social interaction, and adaptive behavior, requiring individualized and holistic educational strategies. (Veryawan et al. 2023). According to Aslamiyah and Harsiwi, a comprehensive approach is crucial to helping autistic children develop to their full potential, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. The

challenges faced by autistic children often make it difficult for them to grasp the concepts of discipline, empathy, and responsibility, as do children in general (Aslamiyah and Harsiwi 2024). These challenges often make it difficult for them to grasp the concept of discipline, unlike children in general.

In an Islamic perspective, education (*education*) is not only interpreted as a process of transferring knowledge, but also as an effort to purify the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*) through habituation, role modeling, and continuous spiritual practice (Al-Ghazali 2005). Ideal education not only hones rational intelligence but also fosters spiritual and moral intelligence. Therefore, education for autistic children requires an approach oriented toward compassion, empathy, and behavioral adaptations that align with their unique needs.

Given these challenges and potential, education is a crucial tool for developing the abilities of autistic children to become independent, disciplined, and emotionally balanced. In this context, the role of teachers and parents becomes crucial. Teachers act as role models and facilitators of adaptive learning, while parents reinforce spiritual values through instilling them at home. Character education plays a crucial role in helping autistic children understand behavioral boundaries, establish routines, and learn about the consequences of their actions. This has implications for increasing children's independence and regularity in their daily lives. In line with research by Fifi Nofiaturrehman entitled "*Implementation of Inclusion Education in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Keji, West Ungaran*" emphasizes the importance of synergy between teachers and parents in inclusive, Islam-based education. This collaboration is key to successfully developing the Islamic character of children with special needs (Nofiaturrehman and Kusmiyarsih 2023).

The Darul Fatonah Singocandi Kudus Foundation is an example of an institution that integrates Islamic character education with behavioral and communication therapy. According to Ghufron & Nasir in the book *Islamic Boarding School for Autistic Children*, Habituating religious activities such as congregational prayer, dhikr, and communal prayer is an effective form of spiritual therapy in fostering empathy, emotional balance, and moral sensitivity in autistic children. Islamic

character education not only teaches good values theoretically but also instills spiritual experiences that shape a child's behavior and personality holistically (Ghufron, M. N., & Nasir, A. 2019).

Based on this explanation, researchers were motivated to conduct research on the role of teachers and parents in shaping Islamic character education for children with autism. This study aims to describe how synergy between teachers and parents can create an inclusive educational approach that accommodates the special needs of children with autism and develops independent and responsible Islamic character. This research is expected to contribute to the development of an adaptive, holistic, and contextual Islamic character education model tailored to the needs of children with special needs.

Materials and Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a naturalistic approach that emphasizes understanding social phenomena based on real conditions in the field (Creswell, J. W. 2014). The study population was teachers and parents of autistic children at the Darul Fatonah Singocandi Kudus Foundation. Research subjects were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in mentoring autistic children. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation in an integrated manner to obtain in-depth information. Data analysis used a thematic analysis approach according to the stages proposed by Creswell, including organizing data, coding, developing themes, and interpreting the meaning of the data. This study aims to describe the role of teachers and parents in Islamic character education for autistic children and to identify practices and challenges in implementing inclusive education.

Results and Discussion

The Role of Teachers as Role Models and Adaptive Facilitators

Based on the results of observations and in-depth interviews with teachers at the Darul Fatonah Singocandi Kudus Foundation, it was found that

teachers have a dual role as *good deeds* (moral role models) and learning facilitators who are adaptive to the needs of autistic children. In daily learning, teachers practice Islamic values through concrete activities such as congregational prayer, group prayer, and the habit of greeting. These activities not only introduce worship rituals but also serve as Islamic behavioral therapy that fosters discipline and emotional calm.

Observational data shows that students with hyperactive tendencies are better able to adapt when learning uses visual and kinesthetic approaches, such as the use of illustrated prayer cards and videos of ablution practices. Teachers also apply the principle Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) by providing positive reinforcement in the form of verbal praise such as "Masha Allah" or "Alhamdulillah, you're great!" every time a child demonstrates Islamic behavior (Cooper, J. O., Heron, T. E., & Heward, W. L. 2020). Interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers showed that this method was effective in increasing the participation and self-confidence of autistic children.

In a book excerpt *Islamic Boarding School for Autistic Children*, explained that routine worship activities such as dhikr and congregational prayer are forms of spiritual therapy that can stabilize the emotions of children with special needs (Ghufron, M. N., & Nasir, A. 2019). Researchers found that teachers at this foundation have implemented these principles with discipline and empathy. Meanwhile, according to Andri Priyatna, emphasized the importance of consistency and emotional warmth of teachers to create a sense of security and closeness, two things that are also reflected in teacher behavior in the field. (Andri Priyatna 2010)

In addition to fostering the habit of worship, teachers also play a role in developing Islamic social skills, such as sharing, helping friends, and apologizing. In interviews, teachers explained that the strategies modelling/direct modeling is more effective than verbal commands for autistic children. This finding is consistent with research by Febriani and Efi entitled "Innovative Efforts of Islamic Education Teachers in Instilling *Akhlakul Karimah* in Autistic Students at Special Needs Schools (SLB)" reveals that Islamic Religious

Education teachers play an important role in shaping the noble character of autistic students through strategies exemplary behavior, habituation, supervision, as well as appreciation and reprimand. The role model approach has proven to be most effective because autistic children find it easier to imitate real behavior than to receive verbal commands.

Teachers model behaviors such as greeting others, disposing of trash properly, speaking politely, and helping friends. These efforts are supported by school programs such as class beliefs, school agreements, And positive culture which fosters the values of sharing, cooperation, and empathy. The success of this development is supported by collaboration between teachers, parents, and schools, although challenges such as student learning difficulties and inconsistent implementation of values at home remain. (Febriani Arum Khusnul Khotimah and Efi Tri Astuti 2025)

Teachers at the Darul Fatonah Singocandi Kudus Foundation play a dual role as moral role models and adaptive facilitators who instill Islamic values and social skills in autistic children through habituation of worship, visual-kinesthetic approaches, positive reinforcement, and modeling strategies that have proven to be more effective than verbal commands.

The Role of Parents as Strengtheners of Spirituality and Habits at Home

Interviews revealed that spiritual practices at home are a direct extension of school activities. Parents train their children to recite the *Asmaul Husana* (The Beautiful Names of Allah) before bed, pray before meals, and repeat memorized daily prayers. One informant said:

"If my child is accustomed to praying and performing namaz at school, I continue the practice at home. If successful, I award a star on the award board.." (Esty, interview, June 20, 2025)

Usagereward This has been proven effective in strengthening children's spiritual motivation, in line with the research findings of Partono et al., which showed that implementing a reward system can increase the consistency of children's religious behavior through positive reinforcement within the family and school environment (Partono et al. 2021).

Thus, it can be concluded that the success of children's spiritual habits depends not only on school activities but also on the continuity and consistent support from the family at home.

In line with this, in the book "First Steps in Interacting with Autistic Children", it is explained that the involvement of positive emotions and gentle eye contact can strengthen the emotional bond between parents and children, while reducing the intensity of tantrum behavior (Wendy Prevezer, Suzie Candler, Phil Christie, Elizabeth Newson 2013). This finding confirms that loving and respectful interactions are not only relevant for children with special needs, but are also effective in shaping children's spiritual character in general through emotional closeness and positive communication at home.

Field observations show an increase in spiritual independence in children who are consistently guided by their parents. Children become accustomed to performing ablution without assistance and can follow prayers in the correct order. This aligns with research by Fifi Nofiaturrehman & Kusmiyarsih, which found that active parental involvement accelerates the internalization of Islamic values and creates continuity between learning at school and spiritual practice at home (Nofiaturrehman and Kusmiyarsih 2023).

Thus, it can be concluded that children's spiritual habits are optimally formed through synergy between the school and family environments. Positive reinforcement, emotional closeness, and active parental involvement are key factors in maintaining the continuity and effectiveness of a child's spiritual character-building process.

Synergy between Teachers and Parents in Inclusive Islamic Character Education

Documentation of monthly meetings between teachers and parents demonstrates effective communication and coordination through child development reflection forums. In these forums, teachers report on their children's spiritual and social development, while parents provide input on support strategies at home. This collaboration demonstrates the complementary relationship between the formal educational environment and

the family, the child's primary educational institution.

Based on triangulation of data from interviews and observations, the following results were obtained:

Aspects	Result
Spiritual aspects	Children have been able to follow congregational prayers in an orderly manner.
Social aspects	Children begin to show empathy by helping friends and greeting teachers without being reminded.
Emotional aspects	There was a decrease in tantrum after three months of implementing routine joint worship activities at school.

These findings show that religious activities carried out collectively and consistently, accompanied by parental guidance, can foster spiritual awareness, social empathy, and emotional stability in children. Conceptually, these results are in line with Al-Ghazali's theory of Islamic character education, which emphasizes the importance of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) through the habituation of good deeds and exemplary morals. According to Al-Ghazali, character education must be carried out repeatedly and continuously, starting from the family as the first madrasah to the school environment which reinforces the values of manners and worship.

The synergy between teachers and parents in this context shows the application of the principle *brotherhood* and compassion which is the core of Islamic character development. Through a loving approach, children learn to understand the value of goodness not only as moral knowing, but also as moral feeling and moral action, as explained by Thomas Lickona, character education must touch on these three moral dimensions so that the values taught do not stop at the cognitive realm, but are manifested in everyday behavior (Thomas Lickona 2019).

In line with this, in the book *Islamic Boarding School for Autistic Children* By Ghufron & Nasir, it is explained that the habit of collective worship can foster empathy and moral sensitivity in children. Children who were previously individualistic begin to show social initiatives such as arranging prayer equipment together and politely reprimanding friends. (Ghufron, M. N., & Nasir, A. 2019) This phenomenon shows the success of the process of internalizing moral and spiritual values that takes place through harmonious interactions between the family and school environments.

The results of this study are also strengthened by the findings Solihin, Narti, and Tania entitled "Emotional Development in Early Childhood: Integration of Islamic Values and Social-Emotional Development" states that the integration of Islamic values in early childhood learning can improve children's social-emotional and spiritual development through teacher role models and active parental participation (Solihin et al. 2023).

Thus, it can be concluded that the synergy between teachers and parents in fostering spiritual activities is a concrete implementation of holistic Islamic character education. This approach not only strengthens the religious aspect but also fosters emotional and social balance in children in an inclusive manner.

Conclusions

This study confirms that the roles of teachers and parents have complementary contributions in shaping inclusive Islamic character education for autistic children. Teachers play a role as good deeds/moral role models and adaptive facilitators who instill Islamic values through habitual worship, visual-kinesthetic approaches, and positive reinforcement. Meanwhile, parents serve as spiritual reinforcers and habituators at home through role modeling, emotional closeness, and consistent application of rewards.

The synergy between the two creates continuity between the school and family environments as a harmonious educational space. Data triangulation results show significant improvements in children's spiritual, social, and emotional aspects including

increased regularity in congregational prayer, increased social empathy, and decreased tantrum behavior.

Theoretically, this finding strengthens Al-Ghazali's view that character education must be based on *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) through the habit of doing good deeds, and in line with the concept moral *knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action* from Thomas Lickona. Collaboration between teachers and parents is a concrete manifestation of the principle of brotherhood and compassion in Islamic education, which is able to realize the development of the character of autistic children in a complete way not only understanding the values of goodness, but also living them in everyday behavior.

Thus, inclusive Islamic character education demands a humanistic, collaborative, and sustainable approach between schools and families so that autistic children can grow into individuals with good morals, who are independent, and who are accepted in their social environment.

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