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Inclusive Pedagogical Strategies of Islamic Education Teachers in Managing Heterogeneous Primary Classrooms: A Qualitative Study from Indonesia

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Abstract

Managing heterogeneous classrooms presents a significant challenge for teachers, particularly in the field of Islamic Education where learners differ not only in academic ability and socio-economic background but also in religious affiliation. This study aimed to explore how an experienced Islamic Education teacher develops and applies inclusive pedagogical strategies to address diversity in a primary school in Indonesia. The problem addressed was the limited research examining the lived experiences of Islamic Education teachers in heterogeneous classroom contexts, especially when non-Muslim students are also present. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through an in-depth interview with a teacher who had more than 16 years of teaching experience across multiple grade levels. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key strategies and their outcomes (Braun and Clarke's, 2006). The findings revealed that the teacher implemented differentiated instruction, creative teaching aids, flexible seating arrangements, remedial sessions, adaptive assessment, and strong collaboration with parents and the school community. These strategies not only reduced learning gaps but also fostered student engagement and inclusivity, particularly for non-Muslim learners. The study concluded that inclusive pedagogy in Islamic Education can serve as a model for promoting both academic success and interfaith cohesion in diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: classroom management, differentiated instruction, inclusive pedagogy, Islamic Education, primary school.

1. Introduction

The management of heterogeneous classrooms poses significant challenges in contemporary education, particularly within primary schools where students exhibit substantial variation in academic abilities, socio-economic backgrounds, and cultural or religious affiliations. Prior research has demonstrated that such diversity requires teachers to adopt pedagogical approaches that are flexible and responsive to learners' needs. For example, found that heterogeneous classrooms often experience learning gaps that necessitate differentiated instructional strategies. Similarly, Sari and Hidayanti (2020) reported that socio-economic disparities significantly influence students' readiness to learn, making inclusive teaching methods essential. International evidence also supports these claims; Tomlinson (2014) argues that differentiated instruction is critical for ensuring equitable learning opportunities, while Booth and Ainscow (2011) highlight that inclusive pedagogy fosters student engagement and participation across diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Therefore, teachers are tasked with designing and implementing inclusive pedagogical strategies that ensure equitable access to learning as well as foster active participation among diverse learners. While many studies have investigated classroom management in heterogeneous contexts, a notable portion has utilized quantitative methodologies that primarily concentrate on student outcomes or achievement gaps (Rante et al., 2020). In contrast, qualitative perspectives that capture the lived experiences of teachers, particularly in the domain of Islamic Education, are critically required. These perspectives are essential, as inclusivity is considered both a pedagogical and religious obligation within this context (Fatoni et al., 2021).

For instance, Rante et al. (2020) found that teachers often feel unequipped to implement inclusive practices effectively due to a lack of training and resources. Furthermore, the incorporation of technology, as discussed by Hatzigianni et al. (2023), shows potential in bridging communication gaps between educators and families, thereby enhancing inclusive practices. Qualitative research can also unveil the complexities inherent in educators' teaching practices. This is indicated by the work of Syahputra et al. (2024), who emphasized that authentic engagement in Islamic character education fosters holistic student development. The limited qualitative investigations in this field contrast sharply with the pressing need for deeper insights into how teachers navigate inclusivity in classrooms shaped by diverse cultural and religious identities. As noted by Banks (2016), *"teachers need deeper, context-rich understandings of cultural and religious diversity to create truly inclusive learning environments"*. This further underscores the necessity for more research to evoke a nuanced understanding of these dynamics in Islamic educational contexts.

Previous research has consistently highlighted the importance of differentiated instruction, multisensory strategies, and inclusive pedagogical approaches in addressing student diversity (J Fossen et al., 2021; Jackson, 2018). However, a notable gap exists in understanding how Islamic Education teachers in Indonesia navigate the complexities of managing heterogeneity that encompasses students from various religious backgrounds within the same classroom context. Previous studies have examined inclusive practices in Indonesian schools, highlighting the importance of accommodating cultural and religious diversity in learning environments (Suprapto

et al., 2023; Wahid & Prasojo, 2022). Most existing literature tends to assume religious homogeneity within Islamic educational settings, which overlooks the potential richness and challenges that come from integrating diverse belief systems. In this regard, it suggests that religious education based on universal values equips students with the skills necessary to evaluate their behavior towards diversity, thus enabling a more inclusive learning atmosphere (Sulaiman, 2022). Research by Idris et al. (2024) further emphasizes that Islamic teachings inherently promote tolerance and respect for diversity, guiding educators in fostering an inclusive environment for both Muslim and non-Muslim students.

Additionally, the work of highlights the responsibility of educators to create learning experiences that embrace diversity of conscience and respect students' varied backgrounds (Fossen et al., 2021). Consequently, the novelty of this study lies in its exploration of inclusive pedagogical strategies within a heterogeneous classroom, revealing how both Muslim and non-Muslim students can engage productively in Islamic Education lessons, thereby transcending traditional narratives about the exclusivity of religious education (Nisa, 2021). By addressing this underexplored aspect, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how Islamic Education can serve as a model for interfaith inclusivity while upholding core educational values (Rahawarin, 2023).

This paper aims to address a critical gap in the existing literature by providing an in-depth qualitative account of how an experienced Islamic Education teacher adapts sexist teaching practices to accommodate diverse learners within an Indonesian primary school. Unlike prior studies that often generalized pedagogical strategies or focus heavily on curriculum design, this research emphasized the unique lived experiences, reflections, and adaptive approaches of one teacher within a real-world classroom context. The findings suggested that inclusive pedagogical strategies in Islamic Education are not only feasible but essential for effectively reducing learning gaps and enhancing engagement among students of varied backgrounds. Indeed, differentiated instruction tailored to student readiness can significantly improve learner satisfaction and achievement (Adiyono et al., 2025; Chien, 2012).

Furthermore, inclusive educational practices have been found to support interfaith inclusivity, helping students to engage positively with peers from different backgrounds (Zulaikhah et al., 2023). Notably, this study argues that integrating diverse instructional methods—such as those highlighted by Firmender (2012), which advocate for varying instructional groups to meet the learning needs of all students—provides a framework for effective classroom management in heterogeneous settings (Firmender et al., 2012). By analyzing the teacher's practices through the lens of inclusive pedagogy and differentiated instruction, this research aimed to demonstrate that effective classroom management in Islamic Education can serve as a model for both academic success and social cohesion in diverse educational contexts. Consequently, the across cultural and religious divides, reinforcing the importance of inclusivity in Indonesian educational practices (Fatoni et al., 2021; Zulaikhah et al., 2023). This raises an important inquiry that guides the present study: How do Islamic

Education teachers develop and implement inclusive pedagogical strategies to manage heterogeneous classrooms in Indonesian primary schools?.

2. Method

Participants

The study involved one Islamic Education teacher (female, 39 years old) with 16 years and 3 months of teaching experience at SDN 001 Pasir Belengkong, Paser, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. She taught Islamic Education across all grade levels (1–6) in a school with 111 students from diverse academic, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds. This teacher was purposefully selected as the sole participant because of her extensive experience and because the initial school profile—constructed through discussions with the principal and a review of school documents—indicated that she consistently handled classes with diverse student abilities, learning behaviors, and religious backgrounds. This confirmation from the principal, along with her long-term responsibility for teaching multi-level Islamic Education, provided clear justification for considering her as an information-rich case study suitable for qualitative research.

Design

This research adopted a qualitative descriptive design, aiming to explore in depth the pedagogical strategies employed by the teacher to manage a heterogeneous classroom. The design was chosen to capture lived experiences, teaching practices, and reflections on inclusivity in Islamic Education. Data were analyzed thematically, guided by theories of inclusive pedagogy and differentiated instruction, to identify patterns and generate insights (Braun, V., & Clarke, V., 2006; 2021). The study emphasized depth of understanding rather than generalization, in line with the principles of qualitative inquiry (Sugiyono, 2015).

Furthermore, when teachers and school leaders recognize parents as partners in the educational process, it cultivates an inclusive atmosphere that respects and accommodates the diverse cultural backgrounds of students, enhancing overall educational equity, as supported by Osiba (2024) and Sachdeva (2023). Hence, the collaborative practices reflected in this study provided a robust framework for fostering effective family-school partnerships, crucial for improving educational outcomes for students in diverse settings.

Materials

The primary material was an interview protocol consisting of 30 structured questions organized into nine thematic domains: (1) teacher identity, (2) characteristics of classroom heterogeneity, (3) teaching strategies, (4) classroom management, (5) evaluation and assessment, (6) challenges and solutions, (7) collaboration with parents and schools, (8) impacts of strategies, and (9) suggestions and expectations. In addition, field notes and audio recordings were used to ensure the accuracy of the data.

Table 1 - Nature and preparation of the interviews and field notes

Aspect	Description	Evidence / Procedure
Development of interview protocol	The 30 questions were organized into 9 thematic domains to answer the research objectives (from teacher identity to suggestions).	The initial draft was prepared based on literature review (inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction) and research objectives; The final version contains 30 core questions + probes.
Basis of preparation	Theoretical and practical foundations: inclusive theory, differentiated instruction, school documents (class lists, programs)	Theoretical references: Tomlinson (2014), Braun & Clarke (2006, 2021); School documents are checked for context.
Validation & pilot	Content validation through internal peer-review; Trial on one colleague teacher to check the fluency and time	Input from two qualitative researchers; minor revision after mock interview.
Interview format	Semi-structured (structured but flexible), allowing for the elaboration of concrete experiences and examples	Core questions followed by probes: examples of recent lessons, demonstration of props, reflection.
Implementation & setting	Conducted once a session, face-to-face, private room at school during school holidays to avoid disturbances	Implementation time: July 2025; The atmosphere is recorded in Field Notes.
Duration	Approximately 60 minutes per session, one session per participant	Duration is noted; The audio is recorded after obtaining written permission.
Bahasa & Report	Interview in Indonesian; It begins with an explanation of the purpose, confidentiality, and consent of the record	Steps to build rapport: casual opening, anonymous affirmation.
Recording & transcription	Audio recorded (with permission), transcribed verbatim; English translation for citation when needed	Transcripts are double-checked against recordings; The files are stored encrypted.
Field notes	Record the non-verbal, context of the room, the artifacts mentioned, and	Notes are made during & immediately after the interview;

	the researcher's reflective memos	expanded to analytic memos within 24 hours.
Time to take notes	Contemporary and reflective: during the interview (brief) + elaboration after (detailed)	Initial notes + analytical memos = audit trails/ reflections of researchers.
The role of records in analysis	Triangulation with transcripts; help with thematic coding (Braun & Clarke) and maintain the context of the quotation	Field notes are used to select quotes, interpret tone/sarcasm, and compile initial code.
Ethics & data management	Written permissions, anonymized identity, encrypted storage, participant withdrawal rights	Approval documents are saved; file access restricted by researchers; Quotes are presented without personal identity.

Table 1 describes the planning, implementation, and utilization of the interviews and field notes used in this study. The interview protocol was based on theoretical studies on inclusivity and differentiated learning, then validated through peer review and pre-testing to ensure clarity and contextual appropriateness. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format for approximately 60 minutes, in Indonesian, and in a private room to ensure participant comfort. The entire process was audio-recorded with official permission and transcribed verbatim, while field notes were taken during and immediately after the interviews to capture nonverbal cues, situational context, and the researcher's analytical reflections. Both transcripts and field notes served as sources of triangulation, strengthening the credibility of the thematic analysis and ensuring that data interpretation remained aligned with participants' authentic experiences.

Procedure

The interview was conducted during the school holiday period in July 2025, allowing the teacher to reflect comprehensively on her teaching practices without classroom disruptions. The session lasted approximately 60 minutes and was carried out in a private setting at the school to ensure comfort and confidentiality. Prior to the interview, the purpose of the research was explained, and informed consent was obtained, including permission to record the session. The teacher was assured of anonymity and the right to withdraw at any point. During the interview, questions were presented one by one, and the teacher was encouraged to provide detailed responses rather than short answers.

Table 2. Probing Strategies Used During the Interview

Type of Probe	Purpose	Sample Probing Questions Used	How It Helped Generate Detailed Responses
Clarification Probe	Ensure the meaning of the answer is clearer and unambiguous	<i>"Can you explain what you mean by 'students have difficulty focusing'?"</i>	Help participants clarify terms, situations, or reasons that were previously presented in general.
Example Probe	Ask for concrete examples from teaching experiences	<i>"Can you give me an example of the last incident when a student left the class?"</i>	Generate specific data in the form of real narratives that reinforce the authenticity of the findings.
Elaboration Probe	Request additional details from a statement that is still too short	<i>"What do you usually do after seeing students starting to lose attention?"</i>	Encourage participants to expand their answers so that the information is richer and more in-depth.
Evaluation Probe	Dig into the judgment or reason behind the action	<i>"Why do you think that strategy is more effective than other methods?"</i>	Provide insight into the teacher's professional considerations and reflections.
Purpose Probe	Uncovering the purpose or motivation for the action	<i>"What is the purpose of Mom giving remedials after class hours, not during class?"</i>	Generate a deeper understanding of the participants' pedagogical logic.
Feeling/Reflection Probe	Exploring the teacher's feelings and personal reflections	<i>"How do you feel when you face students who often drop out of class?"</i>	Adding an emotional dimension that enriches qualitative interpretation.
Verification Probe	Ensure accuracy and confirm sensitive statements	<i>"Is it true that non-Muslim students also take PAI classes before receiving their religious guidance?"</i>	Ensure the accuracy of the data and avoid misinterpretations.

These probing strategies, as listed in Table 2, were used to ensure that the teacher's responses were clear, detailed, and grounded in concrete experiences. Clarification and example probes helped refine ambiguous statements, while elaboration and

evaluation probes encouraged the teacher to explain her actions and reasoning. Purpose and reflection probes revealed the motivations and emotions behind her decisions, and verification probes ensured the accuracy of sensitive information. Together, these probes strengthened the depth and credibility of the interview data. Follow-up prompts were used to clarify and expand on key points. After completion, the participant was thanked, debriefed about the research objectives, and invited to share any final reflections.

3. Results

3.1 Characteristics of the Heterogeneous Classroom

The study revealed that the classroom in SDN 001 Pasir Belengkong is characterized by diversity in academic ability, socio-economic background, and religious affiliation, as shown in Table 3. The total number of students was 111, including one Christian student who still participated in Islamic Education classes. Approximately 25% of students came from low-income families, and some had not attended kindergarten prior to entering primary school.

Table 3 - Characteristics of students in the heterogeneous classroom

Dimension	Description	Percentage/Number
Academic Ability	High, medium, and low achievers in the same class	-
Socio-Economic Status	Families with adequate income	75%
	Families with limited economic resources	25%
Religious Background	Muslim students	110
	Christian student (still attending Islamic Education class with adjustment)	1

3.2 Inclusive Pedagogical Strategies Implemented

The Islamic Education teacher, with 16 years of teaching experience, applied a range of strategies to respond to the diversity of learners. To meet the diverse needs of students in heterogeneous classroom environments, teachers employ a variety of strategic pedagogical methods that are essential for optimizing learning. The use of creative teaching aids, including handmade hijaiyah cards and thematic posters, is particularly targeted at visual learners, facilitating a clearer understanding of abstract concepts, even with limited resources. These sensory-engaging materials can significantly enhance the understanding of learners at various achievement levels, in line with findings demonstrating the positive impact of innovative methodologies on student learning outcomes (Sánchez et al., 2025). Furthermore, integrating music and games—including Islamic songs and rhythmic recitation of the Koran—has been shown to create a fun learning environment and maintain student engagement. Gamification, as reported in recent studies, can promote increased motivation and retention of educational content (Ahmad, 2025; Arufe-Giráldez et al., 2022), further

supported by research showing that active participation through games improves classroom dynamics (Ahmad, 2025).

Furthermore, teachers' language adaptation strategies, which involve simplifying complex religious vocabulary and connecting it to relevant everyday experiences, are examples of methods that ensure inclusiveness for both high- and low-achieving students. This aligns with pedagogical best practices that emphasize contextual understanding as vital to comprehension. The implementation of tiered assignments creates a structured learning environment that allows advanced students to explore enrichment activities while providing necessary support for those who need it. Research has shown that adapting task complexity to each student's individual needs is a crucial element of effective learning (Wilson & Srikanth, 2024).

Seating arrangements also play a crucial role in enhancing classroom interaction, as studies have shown that strategic seating arrangements can promote positive academic and behavioral outcomes (Humaeroah et al., 2023; Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008). This flexibility allows teachers to adjust seating configurations—either in groups for collaborative tasks or semicircles for discussions—to accommodate different interaction preferences and learning objectives. Finally, increasing student active participation through demonstrations of learned concepts, such as reenacting ablution or reciting holy verses, not only encourages peer learning but also provides immediate feedback on student understanding. This active engagement is supported by literature advocating the effectiveness of participatory learning as a means of strengthening self-confidence and facilitating direct assessment of understanding (Adiyono et al., 2022; Mazlan et al., 2025).

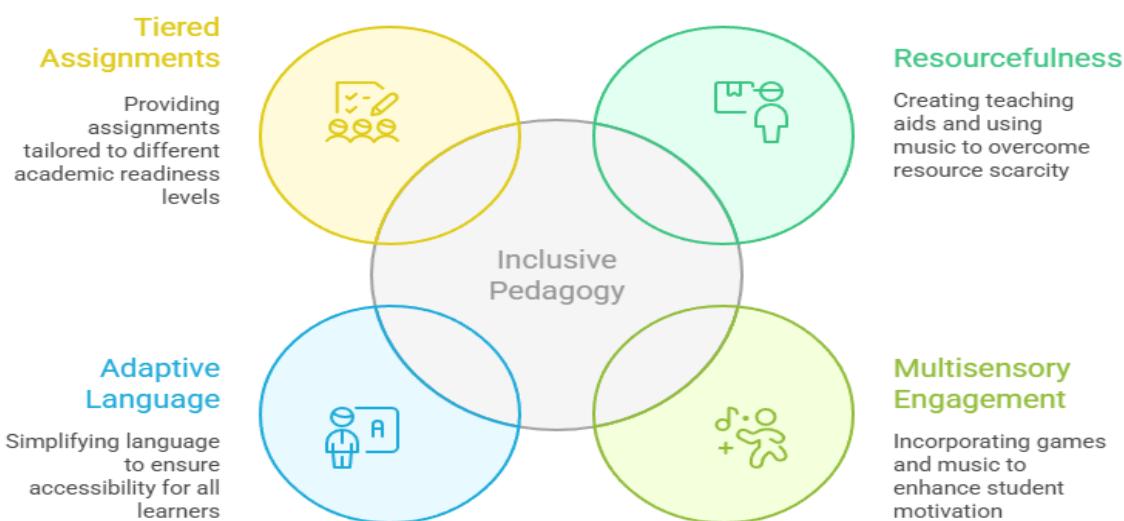


Figure 1 - Effective Islamic education

Figure 1 illustrates the core components of effective Islamic Education through the lens of inclusive pedagogy. At the center is inclusivity, operationalized through four key strategies. First, tiered assignments adjust task difficulty to match students' academic readiness. Second, adaptive language simplifies explanations so all learners

can follow. Third, resourcefulness appears in the teacher's use of self-made teaching aids and music to overcome limited resources. Fourth, multisensory engagement—through games and songs—helps sustain motivation and interest. Together, these strategies create an accessible and engaging learning environment. Together, these strategies demonstrated how Islamic Education can be both equitable and engaging, ensuring that classroom diversity becomes an asset rather than a barrier to learning.

Furthermore, the use of flexible seating arrangements and active participation strategies reflected an understanding of the social dynamics within a heterogeneous classroom. Allowing students to work in groups or individually depending on the lesson encouraged collaboration while also respecting differences in learning pace. Demonstrations by students not only promoted deeper comprehension but also built confidence and peer-to-peer learning opportunities. These practices collectively illustrate how inclusive pedagogical strategies can transform potential challenges of classroom diversity into opportunities for creativity, engagement, and inclusivity—ultimately fostering both academic progress and a sense of belonging for all learners.

3.3 Addressing Learning Difficulties

The teacher identified a subgroup of students who were frequently distracted or even left the classroom during lessons. To address this, the teacher provided individual learning support at the end of class sessions, allowing for remedial teaching without disrupting the whole class. As claimed by the teacher, one subgroup of students seemed to lose their focus constantly, some of the time even leaving the lessons. She elaborated, "Ada beberapa anak yang sulit fokus; kadang mereka keluar kelas tanpa izin, jadi saya harus memberi perhatian lebih" (Teacher Interview, 2025). To cope with these issues, she offered individual learning support at the end of class sessions, where students participated in focused remedial instruction without disturbance to the rest of the class. Of this arrangement, the teacher explained, "Biasanya setelah pelajaran selesai, saya panggil mereka satu per satu supaya bisa mengulang materi dengan lebih tenang" (Teacher Interview, 2025). This approach very much helped to ensure that students with chronic learning difficulties were receiving personalized support in a structured and workable manner.

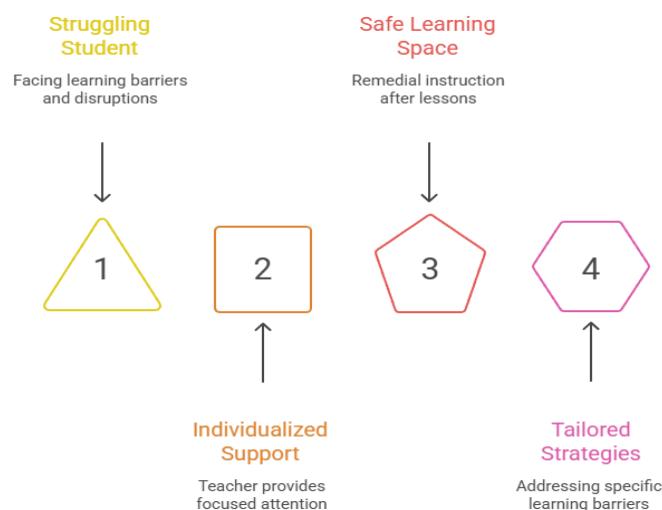


Figure 2 – Remedial instruction for struggling students

Figure 2 shows the remedial instruction process, beginning with identifying students who face learning difficulties, followed by providing individualized support. Remedial sessions are conducted after regular classes to create a focused and comfortable learning environment, and the teacher applies targeted strategies to address each student's specific challenges. Together, these steps form an inclusive approach that ensures struggling learners receive the necessary support without disrupting the wider classroom environment.

Over time, this remedial practice contributed to a gradual improvement in both academic performance and classroom behavior. Students who had previously disengaged became more willing to participate in group activities, as they no longer felt left behind. The positive changes also reduced the learning gap within the class, allowing for more cohesive classroom dynamics. Moreover, other students benefited indirectly, as the teacher was able to maintain lesson flow without frequent interruptions, ensuring that the overall learning environment remained conducive for all. This highlights how individualized follow-up, when integrated into inclusive pedagogy, can serve as an effective strategy for managing heterogeneity in primary classrooms.

3.4 Adaptive Assessment and Feedback

Assessment was not solely based on final outcomes but emphasized student effort. For example, the lowest passing grade was set at 75 for students who attempted tasks, while high achievers received scores up to 100. This approach motivated both advanced and struggling students in this study are defined as learners who consistently require additional explanation, demonstrate slow task completion, or frequently score below the minimum competency level. This mirrors definitions in recent educational research, where students who "read below grade-level expectations and need additional targeted instruction" are considered struggling (Washburn, E. K., & Pierce, A., 2025). Personalized feedback sessions were also conducted after assessments to provide targeted guidance.

The teacher illustrated this during the interview, stating, "*Kalau ada siswa yang sudah berusaha tapi tetap belum maksimal, saya tetap beri nilai minimal 75 supaya mereka tidak putus asa dan tetap mau mencoba lagi*" (Teacher Interview, 2025). She further explained how feedback was individualized: "*Setelah ulangan, saya panggil satu per satu untuk menjelaskan bagian mana yang belum dipahami, supaya mereka tahu apa yang harus diperbaiki*" (Teacher Interview, 2025). Personalized feedback sessions like these enabled targeted guidance that addressed each student's specific learning needs and supported continuous improvement, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 - Example of an adaptive assessment system

Student Performance	Assessment Outcome	Score Range
Completed quickly and correctly	High achievement	90–100
Completed with effort but errors	Recognized effort	75–80
Needed additional guidance	Supplementary support provided	≥75 (minimum)

3.5 Collaboration with Parents and School

The teacher utilized parent-teacher communication channels, such as WhatsApp groups and regular parent meetings, to update parents about student progress and strategies to support learning at home. Collaboration with the school also ensured that facilities and resources were available to support inclusive practices. The teacher utilized parent-teacher communication channels, such as WhatsApp groups and regular parent meetings, to update parents about student progress – evident when she stated, *“Saya selalu kirim laporan singkat di grup WA supaya orang tua tahu perkembangan anak dan bisa membantu di rumah”* (Teacher Interview, 2025). Collaboration with the school also strengthened inclusive practices, as reflected in the teacher’s note: *“Pihak sekolah menyiapkan alat peraga dan ruang tambahan ketika saya butuh mendampingi siswa tertentu”* (Teacher Interview, 2025).

This collaborative approach strengthened the connection between home and school, creating a supportive learning ecosystem that extended beyond the classroom. Parents felt more engaged in their children’s education and were able to reinforce learning at home, while the school provided institutional backing by offering teaching resources and logistical support. As a result, the teacher was able to implement inclusive pedagogical strategies more effectively, ensuring that diverse student needs were addressed holistically. Parents felt more engaged in their children’s education and were able to reinforce learning at home, while the school provided institutional backing by offering teaching resources and logistical support.

This was reflected in parent testimonies, such as when one parent stated, *“Bu Guru selalu memberi kabar lewat WhatsApp, jadi saya tahu apa yang harus dibantu di rumah. Anak saya jadi lebih semangat belajar”* (Parent Interview, 2025). Similarly, the school principal noted, *“Kami menyediakan alat peraga tambahan dan menyesuaikan jadwal ruangan untuk mendukung pembelajaran inklusif yang dilakukan guru”* (Principal Interview, 2025). As a result of this combined support, the teacher was able to implement inclusive pedagogical strategies more effectively, ensuring that diverse student needs were addressed holistically. This synergy between teacher, parents, and school not only improved academic outcomes but also fostered a sense of shared responsibility and community in nurturing students’ personal and religious development.

3.6 Positive Impacts of the Strategies

The inclusive and adaptive strategies implemented by teachers yielded several significant positive outcomes in heterogeneous classrooms. Student engagement and participation increased significantly as creative props, songs, and interactive activities enabled even those with lower academic readiness to participate more confidently in the learning process. These strategies also helped reduce learning gaps, particularly through the use of differentiated assignments and individual remedial sessions that allowed students with weaker academic foundations to gradually catch up with their peers. Furthermore, classroom inclusivity was strengthened through intentional practices that ensured all students, regardless of religious background, felt supported and valued. This was particularly evident in the case of non-Muslim students, whose learning continuity was maintained through meaningful collaboration between the school and local religious institutions. Collectively, these results illustrate the

effectiveness of inclusive pedagogical approaches in fostering equitable learning opportunities and promoting a sense of belonging in a diverse elementary school environment.

Table 5 - Positive outcomes of inclusive and adaptive strategies with supporting interview quotes

Positive Outcome	Description	Supporting Interview Quote
Increased student engagement and participation	Students showed more interest and were willing to actively participate, even those with lower academic readiness.	"Ketika saya menggunakan alat peraga dan lagu, anak-anak jadi lebih bersemangat. Bahkan siswa yang biasanya diam mulai ikut bernyanyi dan menjawab pertanyaan." (Teacher Interview, 2025)
Reduced learning gaps	Differentiated tasks and remedial sessions helped students with weaker academic backgrounds to catch up.	"Ada anak yang sering ketinggalan, tapi setelah saya beri waktu tambahan di akhir pelajaran, mereka bisa memahami materi dengan lebih baik." (Teacher Interview, 2025)
Enhanced classroom inclusivity	Non-Muslim students were supported and included through school-community collaboration.	"Siswa non-Muslim tetap ikut belajar di kelas PAI. Kami bekerja sama dengan gereja agar mereka tetap mendapat pelajaran agamanya, sehingga mereka tidak merasa terabaikan." (Teacher Interview, 2025)

The data presented in Table 5 illustrate how teachers' inclusive and adaptive pedagogical strategies translated into observable improvements in the classroom. Increased engagement emerged when students responded positively to creative media and interactive methods, allowing even those less prepared to actively participate. Narrowed learning gaps were evident through the teacher's use of differentiated assignments and individual remedial sessions, which provided targeted support for struggling learners. Meanwhile, increased classroom inclusivity was demonstrated through the integration of non-Muslim students into the learning process, facilitated by meaningful collaboration between the school and local religious institutions. These interview excerpts highlight teachers' reflective and responsive practices, offering qualitative evidence of how inclusive pedagogical approaches foster a more equitable and engaging learning environment.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study illustrated how Islamic Education teachers in heterogeneous classrooms effectively implement inclusive and adaptive pedagogical strategies to manage the diversity of academic abilities, socio-economic backgrounds, and religious affiliations among their students. This practice aligns closely with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which underscores the significance of scaffolding and social interactions to facilitate learning (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The

teachers' use of individualized support and tiered assignments is indicative of differentiated instruction—a principle strongly supported by Tomlinson, who contends that tailoring instruction to align with students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles is integral to optimizing learning outcomes (Civitillo et al., 2016).

The creation of a safe and supportive learning environment through targeted remedial sessions, as highlighted in this study, consolidates the effectiveness of such inclusivity. These sessions provide personalized guidance to struggling students while preserving the overall classroom dynamic (Lindsay et al., 2013). Driouch (2022) corroborates this notion by demonstrating that remedial teaching in heterogeneous classrooms significantly mitigates learning gaps and enhances inclusivity. Similarly, Civitillo et al. (2016), elaborate on the positive impacts of differentiated teaching methodologies, noting notable enhancements in comprehension levels, particularly among learners with lower academic readiness. The use of differentiated instruction not only minimizes potential disruptions in the class but also cultivates resilience and bolsters the self-confidence of students who may otherwise feel marginalized (Onyesom & Igberaharha, 2021; Sadrani et al., 2020). This multifaceted approach showcases the commitment of educators to adapt their teaching strategies to foster academic success among a diverse student body (Pasira, 2022).

The strategies employed by Islamic Education teachers reflected a strong commitment to inclusive pedagogy, aiming to ensure the participation of all students, including those from non-Muslim backgrounds. This approach is particularly significant within the Indonesian educational context, where diversity is a foundational element of the system. As demonstrated by Muhajir et al., (2025), *Indonesian Islamic educational institutions consistently integrate multicultural and inclusivity values to accommodate students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds*, reinforcing that inclusivity is not only necessary but structurally embedded within Indonesia's educational philosophy. Collaborative efforts between schools and local communities to support non-Muslim students are consistent with findings from research that emphasizes the importance of inclusive practices in fostering tolerance and respect for diversity (Onyesom & Igberaharha, 2021). This demonstrates how Islamic Education can facilitate interfaith inclusivity while maintaining core religious values, potentially serving as a model for pluralistic societies.

Moreover, effective classroom management through flexible seating arrangements, creative media, and active participation techniques underscores the significance of multisensory learning (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Grier-Reed & Williams-Wengerd, 2018). The use of varied instructional modalities, including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic strategies, is supported by research indicating that active and participatory methods significantly enhance student retention and motivation across diverse learning styles (Feldman & Denti, 2017). Such practices address the unique challenges presented in heterogeneous classrooms where traditional "teach to the middle" approaches frequently fall short (Feldman & Denti, 2017). By embracing inclusive pedagogical strategies, teachers not only enhance engagement but also create an equitable learning environment that values diversity—a critical

consideration for fostering effective learning experiences in today's diverse educational landscapes (Busse et al., 2019; Ismail & Aziz, 2020).

The collaborative engagement of teachers with parents and the broader school community exemplifies Bronfenbrenner's (2007) ecological systems theory, which emphasizes the intricate interplay between home, school, and community in shaping student learning outcomes. The innovative use of WhatsApp groups and regular parent meetings illustrates a culturally responsive approach to enhance parental involvement, effectively leveraging digital communication tools to strengthen school-home connections. This aspect of engagement aligns with findings by Hsu and Chen (2023), which indicate that digital platforms markedly improve the parent-school partnership, thereby facilitating continuous student learning at home. Moreover, the evidence suggests that effective communication strategies increase parental involvement in educational activities, which is crucial for fostering a supportive learning environment, as noted by Womack & Johnson (2021). Research by Kuusimäki et al., (2019) highlights that educators' readiness to utilize digital communication is essential for nurturing these partnerships, noting that such platforms provide valuable pathways for frequent and constructive interaction between parents and teachers.

The integration of technology in these interactions can not only support meaningful dialogue but also empower parents to be actively involved in their children's education, thereby positively influencing student engagement and academic success (Hsu & Chen, 2023). Furthermore, when teachers and school leaders recognize parents as partners in the educational process, it cultivates an inclusive atmosphere that respects and accommodates the diverse cultural backgrounds of students, enhancing overall educational equity, as supported by Osiba (2024) and Sachdeva (2023). Hence, the collaborative practices reflected in this study provided a robust framework for fostering effective family-school partnerships, crucial for improving educational outcomes for students in diverse settings.

4. Conclusion

This study revealed a surprising and unique finding: an Islamic Education teacher successfully implemented inclusive pedagogical strategies in a heterogeneous primary classroom that included not only differences in academic ability and socio-economic background but also religious diversity, with a non-Muslim student participating in Islamic Education lessons. This approach, which combined creative media, differentiated tasks, flexible seating, remedial instruction, and collaboration with parents and community institutions, demonstrated that Islamic Education can serve as a platform for inclusivity and interfaith accommodation without compromising its religious values. Such findings were not fully anticipated prior to the research and highlight the transformative role of teacher innovation in managing classroom diversity.

However, this research has several limitations. The study was conducted with a single teacher as the subject, at one school location, and data were collected only through interviews without classroom observation. The focus on one case limits the ability to

generalize findings across different schools, levels of education, or contexts with larger populations. Gender and age variations among teachers were also not explored, nor were multiple methodological approaches such as mixed methods applied. Future research is therefore needed to involve larger and more diverse samples, different educational levels, and varied geographical contexts. Expanding the scope with direct observation, student perspectives, and quantitative validation would provide deeper and more comprehensive insights. With such broader evidence, more appropriate educational policies and teacher training programs can be formulated to strengthen inclusive pedagogy in Islamic Education, ensuring both academic equity and the promotion of social cohesion in increasingly diverse classrooms.

5. Implications and Recommendations

The findings suggested that inclusive pedagogical strategies in Islamic Education classrooms not only address academic heterogeneity but also promote social cohesion and interfaith understanding. This has significant implications for educational policy and teacher training, especially in multicultural societies. Teacher preparation programs should incorporate training in differentiated instruction, inclusive pedagogy, and digital communication with parents to strengthen home-school partnerships.

Future research could expand this study by observing classroom practices directly, involving multiple teachers across different schools, and applying comparative analysis between urban and rural settings. Additionally, investigating student perspectives on the inclusivity of these strategies could enrich understanding of how learners themselves experience adaptive pedagogy. Finally, exploring the integration of technology-based inclusive strategies (e.g., gamification, adaptive learning platforms) may open new avenues for managing heterogeneity in Islamic Education classrooms globally.

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