



Enhancing Student Engagement through Inclusive Islamic Education

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Abstract

This study explores how inclusive Islamic education enhances student engagement in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning at SMPN 2 Bangkala. The revised focus responds to the need for religious classrooms that are not only cognitively meaningful, but also emotionally safe, socially participatory, and spiritually relevant for students with diverse learning readiness, socio-cultural backgrounds, interests, and abilities. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving IRE teachers, students, and school administrators. The findings show that inclusive Islamic education at SMPN 2 Bangkala was enacted through differentiated instruction, contextual and culturally responsive learning, student voice, collaborative activities, character-based learning, and the use of varied media. These practices helped students participate more actively, express ideas confidently, connect Islamic values with everyday experiences, and develop moral awareness. The study also found that inclusive engagement was supported by teacher commitment, school culture, and religious habituation, while challenges included unequal student readiness, limited infrastructure, time constraints, and the need for more consistent teacher-parent collaboration. This article argues that inclusive Islamic education can strengthen student engagement when teachers deliberately combine pedagogical flexibility, Islamic values, empathy, and contextual relevance. The study contributes practical insights for Islamic education teachers seeking to build classrooms where every student is recognized, supported, and encouraged to learn meaningfully.

Keywords: inclusive Islamic education, student engagement, Islamic Religious Education, inclusive pedagogy

Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) occupies a strategic position in Indonesian schools because it contributes to the formation of faith, morality, social responsibility, and spiritual awareness. In

junior secondary education, IRE is expected to help students understand Islamic teachings and translate them into attitudes and behaviors that reflect honesty, responsibility, empathy, tolerance, discipline, and respect for others. However, the effectiveness of IRE does not depend only on the availability of curriculum content. It is also shaped by how teachers design learning experiences that are inclusive, meaningful, participatory, and responsive to student diversity.

The title of this revised article, *Enhancing Student Engagement through Inclusive Islamic Education*, emphasizes two interconnected ideas. First, Islamic education should be inclusive, meaning that it should accommodate students with different levels of readiness, learning styles, social backgrounds, emotional conditions, and personal experiences. Second, inclusive Islamic education should enhance student engagement, not merely classroom attendance. Engagement refers to students' behavioral participation, emotional connection, cognitive investment, and moral-spiritual involvement in learning. When students feel respected and included, they are more likely to ask questions, participate in discussion, reflect on Islamic values, and apply religious teachings in daily life.

The challenge faced by many IRE teachers is that students do not always perceive religious education as closely connected to their everyday realities. Some students regard IRE as a subject that requires memorization of doctrines, rituals, or moral rules, while their actual social experiences are shaped by friendship, family expectations, digital media, local culture, and adolescent identity development. This condition requires teachers to move beyond one-way lecturing and develop inclusive approaches that allow students to see the relevance of Islamic values in real situations. Inclusive pedagogy, in this sense, is not only a method for students with special needs. It is a broader educational orientation that ensures every learner has a meaningful pathway to participate and succeed.

Previous studies indicate that student motivation in IRE is influenced by internal and external factors, including religious awareness, teacher appreciation, parental support, school environment, and learning facilities. Motivation grows when teachers are able to present Islamic content in ways that are accessible and emotionally meaningful. A holistic pedagogical approach that includes moral, emotional, and spiritual guidance has been found to strengthen students' interest in religious learning. Likewise, parental involvement and Islamic school culture, such as congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and the habituation of virtuous behavior, can create a learning ecosystem that supports both motivation and discipline.

At the same time, the implementation of IRE often faces persistent obstacles. Some classes still rely heavily on teacher-centered explanations, limited media, and assessment practices that prioritize recall rather than reflection. Students with strong verbal skills may dominate discussions, while quieter students or those with lower confidence may remain passive. Students

who struggle academically may feel excluded when lessons are not differentiated. In this context, inclusive Islamic education becomes an important strategy to ensure that religious learning does not leave behind students who learn differently, require additional support, or need more contextual examples to understand the material.

SMPN 2 Bangkala provides a relevant setting for examining how inclusive Islamic education can enhance student engagement. As a public junior secondary school, it serves students from varied family, cultural, and academic backgrounds. IRE teachers are required to teach Islamic values while also responding to classroom diversity. The classroom is therefore a space where Islamic teaching, pedagogical creativity, local culture, and student participation meet. This study focuses on how IRE teachers at SMPN 2 Bangkala design inclusive learning, how students respond to those practices, and what factors support or hinder the effort to increase engagement.

This article is significant for three reasons. First, it reframes IRE learning as an inclusive process that values student diversity and recognizes each learner as a moral and spiritual subject. Second, it highlights engagement as a key indicator of successful Islamic education, because students who are engaged are more likely to internalize and practice Islamic values. Third, it offers practical insights for IRE teachers who seek to make classrooms more participatory, empathetic, and contextually relevant. Thus, inclusive Islamic education is positioned not simply as a pedagogical preference, but as a strategic approach for strengthening the quality and relevance of religious education.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore inclusive pedagogical practices in Islamic Religious Education and their contribution to student engagement at SMPN 2 Bangkala. A qualitative design was selected because the study aimed to understand the meaning, process, and contextual dynamics of inclusive teaching as experienced by teachers and students in a natural classroom setting. The focus was not to measure engagement statistically, but to describe how engagement was built through teacher strategies, classroom interaction, and value-based learning.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at SMPN 2 Bangkala. The participants included Islamic Religious Education teachers, students, and school administrators who were directly involved in the learning process. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide relevant information regarding IRE learning, inclusive strategies, student participation, and school support. The inclusion of different participant groups enabled the researcher to understand classroom engagement from multiple perspectives.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Interviews with IRE teachers explored lesson planning, instructional strategies, challenges, and perceptions of student engagement. Interviews with students focused on their experiences of learning IRE, their willingness to participate, and the forms of support they found helpful. Interviews with school administrators provided information about school culture, facilities, and institutional support for inclusive learning. Classroom observations were used to examine how teachers facilitated participation, handled different learning needs, used media, and encouraged dialogue. Document analysis included lesson plans, learning materials, student tasks, and relevant school documents related to religious activities and student development.

Data Validation and Analysis

To ensure credibility, the study used triangulation of sources and methods. Data from interviews were compared with observation notes and documents. Member checking was conducted by presenting key interpretations to participants for confirmation and clarification. The data were analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting information related to inclusive Islamic education and student engagement. Data display was conducted through thematic grouping, while conclusion drawing involved interpreting recurring patterns that emerged from the data.

The analysis focused on five aspects: the planning of inclusive IRE lessons, the implementation of active and contextual learning, the accommodation of student diversity, the factors supporting and inhibiting engagement, and the pedagogical impact of inclusive Islamic education on student participation, motivation, and moral development. This methodological framework made it possible to produce a comprehensive description of how inclusive Islamic education was realized in the classroom.

Research Findings

The findings show that inclusive Islamic education at SMPN 2 Bangkala contributed to enhancing student engagement through a combination of differentiated instruction, student-centered participation, culturally responsive teaching, varied media, empathetic teacher roles, and value-based classroom culture. These strategies were not implemented as separate techniques, but as interconnected practices that helped students feel recognized, supported, and involved in IRE learning.

Differentiated Instruction Based on Student Readiness

IRE teachers demonstrated awareness that students entered the classroom with different levels of readiness, confidence, and learning habits. Some students were able to understand religious concepts quickly, while others required additional explanations, concrete examples, or repeated guidance. To respond to these differences, teachers simplified explanations, used familiar examples, and provided flexible tasks. For students who needed more support, teachers offered guided questions and additional clarification. For students who were more advanced, teachers encouraged deeper reflection and more complex responses.

Differentiated instruction was visible in the way teachers adjusted learning activities. In discussions on Islamic values such as tawakal, responsibility, honesty, and respect, students were not required to express understanding in only one form. Some students responded orally, others wrote short reflections, while some participated through group work. This flexibility gave more students opportunities to demonstrate understanding. As a result, students who were usually passive became more willing to participate because they were not forced into a single mode of expression.

The findings indicate that differentiation supported behavioral and emotional engagement. Students became more attentive because the material was presented at a level they could access. They also became more confident because teachers acknowledged their different learning capacities. In this way, inclusive Islamic education reduced the distance between religious content and student ability, making learning more equitable and meaningful.

Student Voice and Participatory Dialogue

A central feature of inclusive Islamic education at SMPN 2 Bangkala was the recognition of student voice. Teachers did not position students merely as listeners, but as participants who could ask questions, share experiences, and connect Islamic teachings to everyday life. Classroom dialogue was used to discuss values such as honesty, tolerance, responsibility, environmental awareness, and respect for parents and teachers. Students were encouraged to explain how these values appeared in their school and community experiences.

For example, when discussing environmental responsibility from an Islamic perspective, students were invited to identify problems around them, such as littering, wastefulness, or lack of care for school cleanliness. They then linked these issues to Islamic teachings about cleanliness, stewardship, and responsibility. This activity made IRE learning more participatory because students were not simply memorizing moral messages; they were interpreting and applying those messages to real issues.

Student voice also strengthened cognitive engagement. Students were challenged to think, compare, justify, and reflect. In inclusive discussions, teachers gave space for different opinions while guiding students to speak respectfully. The classroom became a dialogic space where students learned that Islamic values could be discussed thoughtfully and applied constructively. This practice increased students' sense of ownership over learning.

Culturally Responsive Islamic Learning

The teachers also used culturally responsive teaching by connecting Islamic concepts with local values and everyday social practices. Religious messages were linked to familiar forms of community life, such as cooperation, respect for elders, mutual help, and social harmony. This approach helped students understand that Islamic values are not abstract concepts separated from their cultural environment. Instead, they can be practiced through local wisdom and daily social relations.

The use of local examples increased emotional engagement because students recognized their own experiences in the lesson. When teachers explained respect, empathy, and responsibility through examples from family and community life, students were more willing to listen and respond. This relevance also strengthened moral engagement. Students were able to see that Islamic teachings guide how they speak to elders, treat friends, participate in community activities, and respond to social problems.

Culturally responsive teaching also promoted inclusivity. Students from different family backgrounds could contribute examples from their own lives. The teacher valued those experiences as part of learning. This helped create a classroom atmosphere in which students felt that their background was not a barrier, but a resource for understanding Islam.

Varied and Inclusive Learning Media

The use of varied media was another important strategy. Teachers used videos, images, role-play, worksheets, storytelling, and group assignments to respond to different learning styles. Visual media helped students who understood concepts more easily through images and examples. Role-play supported students who learned through action and social interaction. Written reflection helped students who needed time to organize their thoughts before speaking.

One observed practice was the use of Islamic storytelling in video format, followed by group reflection. Students watched a story related to moral behavior, then discussed the message in small groups and wrote summaries or personal reflections. This method enabled students with weaker verbal confidence to participate through writing or group support. It also helped students internalize moral lessons in a more enjoyable and memorable way.

Media use was not merely decorative. It functioned as a bridge between religious concepts and student understanding. Inclusive media helped teachers present the same value through different forms, allowing more students to access the lesson. The result was increased attention, participation, and enthusiasm during IRE sessions.

Teacher as Facilitator of Empathy and Safe Participation

The role of the teacher was crucial in making inclusive Islamic education effective. Teachers acted not only as transmitters of knowledge, but also as facilitators of empathy, dialogue, and psychological safety. They established classroom norms that emphasized respect, active listening, and polite language. These norms reduced fear of making mistakes and encouraged students to participate more openly.

Teachers also paid attention to students who had low academic performance, limited confidence, or socio-economic challenges. Individual encouragement was given so that these students did not feel ignored. This personal attention had an important effect on emotional engagement. Students were more willing to learn when they felt that the teacher cared about them as persons, not only as recipients of lessons.

The teacher’s empathy also reflected Islamic educational values. By showing patience, fairness, and compassion, teachers modeled the character they expected students to develop. Inclusive Islamic education therefore operated through both instruction and example. Students learned values not only from the content of lessons, but also from the teacher’s way of interacting with them.

Religious Habituation and School Culture

Student engagement was also supported by the school’s religious culture. Practices such as prayer, Qur’anic recitation, moral reminders, and respectful interaction contributed to an environment where Islamic values were regularly reinforced. These activities strengthened the affective dimension of engagement by making religious learning part of school life, not merely a classroom subject.

Religious habituation helped students see consistency between what they learned in IRE and what they practiced at school. When Islamic values were reflected in school routines, students could internalize them more naturally. This integration of classroom learning and school culture made engagement more sustainable because students encountered religious messages in multiple settings.

Table 1. Inclusive Islamic Education Strategies and Engagement Outcomes

Inclusive Strategy	Classroom Practice	Engagement Outcome
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Differentiated instruction	Flexible explanations, layered tasks, varied response formats	More students access the material and participate with confidence
Student voice	Dialogue, class forums, value-based discussions, reflection questions	Students express opinions and connect Islamic values with lived experience
Culturally responsive learning	Local examples such as cooperation, respect for elders, and community responsibility	Students feel that IRE is relevant to their social and cultural context
Inclusive media	Videos, storytelling, role-play, worksheets, and group tasks	Students with different learning styles remain attentive and involved
Empathetic facilitation	Respectful classroom rules, individual attention, and supportive feedback	Students experience psychological safety and moral encouragement
Religious habituation	Prayer, Qur'anic recitation, moral reminders, and daily ethical routines	Students internalize Islamic values through repeated practice

Discussion

The findings affirm that inclusive Islamic education can enhance student engagement when it is implemented as a comprehensive pedagogical orientation. Engagement in IRE learning is not only a matter of making students active. It involves helping students feel emotionally accepted, cognitively challenged, socially included, and spiritually connected to the values being taught. The strategies applied at SMPN 2 Bangkala show that inclusive pedagogy can transform religious education from a subject of passive reception into a space of dialogue, reflection, and moral formation.

Differentiated instruction is central to this transformation. Students are not identical in ability, confidence, and learning preference. When IRE teachers provide multiple ways to access content and demonstrate understanding, students are more likely to engage. This approach aligns with the principle that Islamic education should recognize the dignity and potential of every learner. In practice, differentiation allows students to grow from their own starting points while still working toward shared religious and moral learning goals.

Student voice is another important dimension. Inclusive education requires classrooms where students are allowed to speak, ask, and reflect. In IRE, this is especially important because religious values become meaningful when students can connect them with their lived experiences. By discussing real issues such as environmental care, honesty, friendship, respect, and responsibility, students learn to interpret Islamic teachings in practical contexts. This process strengthens cognitive and moral engagement simultaneously.

The culturally responsive approach observed in this study also shows that Islamic education becomes more engaging when it is rooted in students' social world. Local values such as cooperation and respect for elders can serve as entry points for understanding Islamic ethics. Rather than separating religion from culture, teachers can use positive cultural practices to demonstrate how Islamic values are lived in community. This makes learning more familiar, inclusive, and relevant.

The use of varied media supports inclusive engagement because students learn in different ways. Videos, role-plays, stories, and collaborative worksheets can help teachers present religious messages in concrete and accessible forms. However, media should not be used only to entertain. In effective inclusive Islamic education, media must be connected to reflection, discussion, and value internalization. The strongest engagement occurs when students are not only attracted by media, but also guided to understand and apply the moral meaning behind it.

The teacher's role remains decisive. Inclusive classrooms require teachers who are sensitive to student differences, able to manage dialogue, and committed to building a safe learning atmosphere. The teacher's empathy is not separate from pedagogy; it is part of the pedagogy itself. When students feel respected, they become more willing to participate. When they see fairness and compassion in the teacher's behavior, they learn Islamic values through lived example.

Nevertheless, several challenges need attention. Limited infrastructure can reduce the consistency of media-based learning. Differences in student readiness require more preparation time for teachers. Limited instructional time may prevent deeper discussion. In addition, teacher-parent communication needs to be strengthened so that inclusive values practiced at school can be supported at home. These challenges suggest that inclusive Islamic education requires institutional support, not only individual teacher commitment.

Overall, the revised focus of this article highlights that student engagement through inclusive Islamic education is built through the integration of pedagogy, values, culture, media, and empathy. It also suggests that Islamic education has strong potential to become a model of inclusive learning because its core values emphasize compassion, justice, respect, and moral responsibility. When these values are translated into classroom practice, IRE can become a powerful medium for engaging diverse learners.

Conclusion

This study concludes that inclusive Islamic education at SMPN 2 Bangkala enhances student engagement by creating learning experiences that recognize diversity, encourage participation, and connect Islamic values with students' everyday lives. The revised title, Enhancing Student

Engagement through Inclusive Islamic Education, accurately reflects the main finding that engagement grows when Islamic education is delivered through inclusive, contextual, dialogic, and empathetic teaching practices.

The strategies implemented by IRE teachers include differentiated instruction, participatory dialogue, culturally responsive examples, varied learning media, character-based learning, and personalized teacher support. These strategies contribute to behavioral engagement through active participation, emotional engagement through a safe and respectful classroom atmosphere, cognitive engagement through reflective discussion, and moral-spiritual engagement through the internalization of Islamic values.

The study also shows that inclusive Islamic education requires support from school culture, teacher creativity, appropriate media, and cooperation with parents. Although challenges remain, including varied student readiness, limited facilities, and time constraints, the findings demonstrate that inclusive approaches can make IRE more relevant, meaningful, and transformative for students.

Practically, IRE teachers are encouraged to design lessons that provide multiple ways for students to participate, use contextual cases from daily life, integrate local wisdom with Islamic values, and build classroom norms based on respect and empathy. Schools should support these efforts by providing facilities, professional development, and policies that strengthen inclusive learning. Future research may examine the relationship between inclusive Islamic education and specific indicators of engagement, such as attendance, participation, reflection quality, and moral behavior.

Recommendations

1. Teachers should develop lesson plans that include differentiated objectives, varied learning activities, and flexible assessment formats so that students with different abilities can participate meaningfully.
2. IRE learning should use contextual Islamic case studies related to friendship, family, environment, social media, honesty, and responsibility to help students connect religious values with real-life situations.
3. Schools should strengthen religious culture through consistent habituation, while ensuring that these routines are inclusive, reflective, and connected to classroom learning.
4. Teacher-parent communication needs to be improved so that student engagement and moral development are supported both at school and at home.

5. Further studies should investigate inclusive Islamic education using broader samples or mixed-method approaches to measure its impact on motivation, learning outcomes, and character development.

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