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## From deficit-based support to flourishing: Integrating Islamic religious education and positive psychology for children with special needs

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### ABSTRACT

Education for children with special needs is often framed through a deficit-based perspective that emphasizes limitations, barriers, and remediation. Although such support is necessary, it may overlook the emotional, moral, spiritual, and personal strengths that children need to develop meaningful learning experiences and positive self-understanding. This article proposes an alternative conceptual perspective by integrating Islamic Religious Education with positive psychology to support the holistic development of children with special needs. Using a literature-based conceptual approach, this study examines how Islamic values and positive psychology constructs can be connected to strengthen well-being, resilience, gratitude, optimism, self-confidence, and social relationships. The analysis shows that Islamic Religious Education can function not only as a subject for transmitting religious knowledge, but also as a transformative space for developing positive character and psychological strength. Concepts such as *syukur* or gratitude, *sabar* or patience, *tawakkal* or trust in God, compassion, and moral responsibility are closely related to positive psychology constructs such as positive emotion, meaning, resilience, engagement, and positive relationships. For children with special needs, this integration can be implemented through adaptive religious instruction, strength-based feedback, emotional support, meaningful routines, storytelling, reflective activities, and inclusive classroom interaction. The study contributes a conceptual foundation for positive and inclusive Islamic Religious Education that moves beyond deficit correction toward flourishing, dignity, and character formation among children with special needs.

### 1. Introduction

Education for children with special needs has traditionally been shaped by a deficit-based perspective. In many educational contexts, children with disabilities or developmental differences are often understood primarily through their limitations, learning barriers, behavioral difficulties, or the need for remediation. This perspective is not entirely wrong, because children with special needs may require individualized support, adaptive instruction, therapeutic assistance, and accessible learning environments. However, when education focuses too heavily on deficits, it may unintentionally reduce children to their difficulties and overlook their strengths, potential, dignity,

emotional needs, and capacity to develop a meaningful life [1, 2].

A more holistic perspective is needed in educating children with special needs. Education should not only aim to reduce barriers or correct learning difficulties, but also to support children in developing self-confidence, emotional balance, social connection, moral awareness, spiritual meaning, and a positive view of themselves. Children with special needs need learning environments that recognize their uniqueness while also nurturing their strengths. In this context, the concept of flourishing becomes highly relevant. Flourishing refers to a condition in which individuals are able to experience positive emotions, build meaningful relationships, develop personal strengths, engage in purposeful activities, and achieve meaningful growth according to their own capacities [3–5].

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Positive psychology offers an important framework for rethinking education for children with special needs. Unlike approaches that focus mainly on pathology, deficits, or failure, positive psychology emphasizes human strengths, well-being, resilience, optimism, gratitude, meaning, engagement, and positive relationships. In educational settings, positive psychology encourages teachers to identify what children can do, what gives them motivation, what makes them feel valued, and how learning can contribute to their emotional and social well-being. For children with special needs, this approach is particularly important because they may frequently encounter stigma, low expectations, exclusion, or repeated experiences of failure. A strength-based approach can help them build confidence, persistence, emotional regulation, and a sense of belonging [6, 7].

Islamic Religious Education also has strong potential to support the holistic development of children with special needs. In Muslim educational contexts, Islamic Religious Education is not merely a subject that transmits religious knowledge. It is also a medium for moral development, spiritual formation, character education, emotional guidance, and social responsibility. Islamic values such as *syukur* or gratitude, *sabar* or patience, *tawakkal* or trust in God, *rahmah* or compassion, *ikhlas* or sincerity, and *husnuzan* or positive thinking can provide meaningful foundations for strengthening children's inner life and character. These values are closely connected to the aims of positive psychology, especially in relation to gratitude, resilience, optimism, meaning, and positive relationships [8–10].

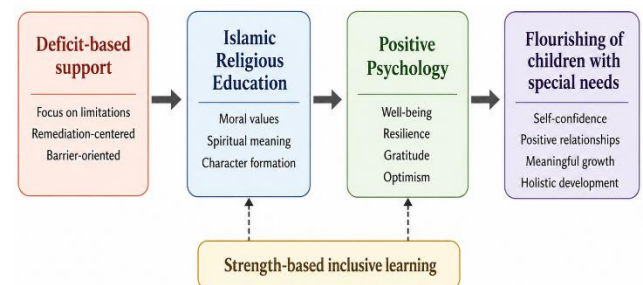
The integration of Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology can provide a new direction for inclusive and special education. Instead of viewing children with special needs only as learners who require correction or assistance, this integration positions them as individuals who possess potential, strengths, emotions, spirituality, and dignity. Islamic Religious Education can provide moral and spiritual meaning, while positive psychology can offer a framework for nurturing well-being, motivation, emotional strength, and positive self-development. When combined, both perspectives can support a more humane and strength-based educational model for children with special needs [3, 11].

This integration is especially important because children with special needs often face challenges beyond academic learning. They may experience difficulties in communication, emotional regulation, social interaction, self-confidence, and participation. Some children may also experience social rejection, frustration, anxiety, or dependency due to repeated barriers in school and society. Therefore, education for children with special needs should include strategies that help them feel accepted, valued, and capable. Islamic Religious Education based on positive psychology can support this process by creating learning experiences that emphasize appreciation, encouragement, meaningful routines, moral storytelling, reflective activities, and positive interaction [12, 13].

However, the integration of Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology for children with special needs has not been sufficiently developed in the literature. Existing discussions on Islamic Religious Education often focus on religious knowledge, worship practices, moral instruction, or character formation in general. Meanwhile, studies on special education commonly emphasize accessibility, adaptive learning, inclusive policy, or disability-specific intervention. Positive psychology has been widely discussed in relation to well-being and education, but its connection with Islamic Religious Education for children with special needs remains relatively limited. This indicates a conceptual gap that needs to be addressed [6, 14, 15].

The present study responds to this gap by proposing a conceptual approach that connects Islamic Religious Education, positive psychology, and the education of children with special needs. The central argument of this article is that Islamic Religious Education can be strengthened by a positive psychology perspective so that it does not only teach religious values, but also nurtures well-being, resilience, gratitude, optimism, self-confidence, and positive relationships. This approach may help shift educational practice from a deficit-based model toward a flourishing-oriented model.

The conceptual direction of this article can be illustrated in Figure 1. The figure shows how education for children with special needs may move from a deficit-based orientation toward flourishing through the integration of Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology.



**Fig. 1.** Conceptual orientation of the study. The integration of Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology supports a shift from deficit-based support toward flourishing among children with special needs.

This study aims to examine how Islamic Religious Education can be integrated with positive psychology to support the holistic development of children with special needs. Specifically, this article explores the relationship between Islamic values and positive psychology constructs, identifies possible learning strategies for inclusive religious education, and proposes a conceptual foundation for strength-based Islamic Religious Education. By doing so, this study seeks to contribute to the development of a more inclusive, meaningful, and humanizing approach to Islamic Religious Education for children with special needs.

The contribution of this article is twofold. Theoretically, it expands the discussion of Islamic Religious Education by linking it with positive psychology and the concept of flourishing. Practically, it offers insights for teachers, schools, and parents in designing religious learning experiences that are adaptive, emotionally supportive, spiritually meaningful, and strength-oriented. In this way, Islamic Religious Education can become not only a medium for teaching religious knowledge, but also a pathway for nurturing dignity, resilience, well-being, and character among children with special needs.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Research design

This study employed a conceptual literature review approach to examine the integration of Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology for children with special needs. A conceptual literature review was selected because the main purpose of this study was not to measure the effectiveness of a specific intervention, but to develop a theoretical and conceptual understanding of how Islamic values and positive psychology constructs can be connected to support the holistic development of children with special needs.

This approach allowed the study to critically examine relevant literature from Islamic Religious Education, positive psychology, inclusive education, and special education. The review focused on identifying conceptual relationships among religious values, psychological strengths, adaptive learning practices, and the flourishing of children with special needs. Therefore, the analysis emphasized interpretation, conceptual mapping, and theoretical synthesis rather than statistical comparison or meta-analysis [4, 16].

## 2.2. Sources of literature

The literature used in this study was obtained from academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and relevant scholarly publications related to Islamic Religious Education, positive psychology, character education, inclusive education, and children with special needs. The reviewed literature included both international and Indonesian sources to provide a balanced understanding of global theoretical perspectives and the local educational context.

The main themes explored in the literature search included Islamic Religious Education, positive psychology, children with special needs, inclusive education, character development, well-being, resilience, gratitude, optimism, emotional support, and flourishing. Foundational literature on positive psychology was used to understand concepts such as well-being, positive emotions, engagement, meaning, resilience, optimism, gratitude, and positive relationships. Literature on Islamic Religious Education was examined to identify values such as *syukur*, *sabar*, *tawakkal*, *husnuzan*, compassion, sincerity, and moral responsibility. Literature on special and inclusive education was used to contextualize the needs, barriers, and learning characteristics of children with special needs.

## 2.3. Literature selection

The literature was selected based on its relevance to the conceptual focus of the study. Sources were included when they met at least one of the following criteria:

- Discussing Islamic Religious Education or Islamic character education;
- Explaining positive psychology constructs such as well-being, resilience, gratitude, optimism, meaning, engagement, or flourishing;
- Addressing educational practices for children with special needs;
- Discussing inclusive or adaptive learning strategies;
- Providing theoretical or practical insights into moral, emotional, social, or spiritual development.

Sources were excluded when they were not related to Islamic Religious Education, positive psychology, special education, inclusive education, or character development. Literature that focused only on clinical diagnosis, general educational technology, or unrelated subject-specific instruction was not included unless it contributed directly to the conceptual discussion of children with special needs and positive development [17, 18].

## 2.4. Analytical procedure

The analysis was conducted through four stages. The first stage was conceptual identification. In this stage, key concepts from the literature were identified, including Islamic Religious Education, positive psychology, children with special needs, deficit-based support, strength-based learning, and flourishing [3, 6, 16].

The second stage was conceptual comparison. Concepts from Islamic Religious Education were compared with constructs from positive psychology to identify areas of convergence. For example, *syukur* was linked with gratitude, *sabar* with resilience, *tawakkal* with meaning and trust, *husnuzan* with optimism, and *rahmah* with positive relationships. This comparison was used to clarify how Islamic values and positive psychology may support similar developmental goals.

The third stage was contextual interpretation. The identified concepts were interpreted in relation to the educational needs of children with special needs. This stage considered how moral, spiritual, emotional, and psychological strengths can be developed through adaptive religious learning. Particular attention was given to the importance of accessible instruction, emotional support, positive feedback, meaningful routines, storytelling, reflection, and inclusive classroom interaction.

The fourth stage was conceptual synthesis. In this stage, the findings were synthesized into a conceptual orientation that shifts the focus from deficit-based support toward flourishing. This synthesis positions Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology as complementary frameworks for supporting the well-being, dignity, resilience, self-confidence, and character development of children with special needs.

## 2.5. Trustworthiness of the conceptual review

To strengthen the trustworthiness of the review, the study used literature from multiple fields, including Islamic education, psychology, special education, and inclusive education. The analysis was conducted by comparing concepts across these fields and identifying recurring patterns of meaning. The conceptual synthesis was developed carefully to avoid forcing connections between Islamic values and positive psychology constructs. Instead, the integration was based on conceptual similarity, educational relevance, and practical applicability for children with special needs [7].

Although this study did not involve field data collection, it provides a conceptual foundation that can be used for future empirical research. The proposed perspective should be further examined through interviews with teachers, classroom observations, case studies, or intervention-based research in inclusive schools and special education settings [6, 14, 15].

## 2.6. Ethical considerations

This study was based entirely on published literature and did not involve human participants, personal data, or direct intervention. Ethical considerations were addressed by accurately representing the ideas of previous scholars, avoiding plagiarism, and ensuring that all sources used in the review were properly cited.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. From deficit-based education to strength-based understanding

The conceptual review shows that education for children with special needs often begins from a deficit-based orientation. In this perspective, children are primarily viewed through their limitations, impairments, learning delays, behavioral difficulties, or dependence on support. Such a perspective is sometimes necessary for identifying barriers and planning individualized assistance. However, when it becomes the dominant way of understanding children, it may limit educational practice to remediation, correction, and compensation [19–21].

A deficit-based approach can unintentionally create low expectations. Children with special needs may be seen as learners who must always be helped, corrected, or normalized. This may affect how teachers design learning activities, how peers interact with them, and how the children perceive themselves. In religious education, this approach may reduce Islamic Religious Education to simplified instruction or behavioral correction, rather than a meaningful space for spiritual, emotional, and character development.

The strength-based perspective offers a different orientation. It does not deny the existence of disabilities or learning barriers, but it shifts attention toward children's potential, dignity, emotional needs, and personal strengths. From this perspective, children with special needs are not only learners who require assistance, but also individuals who can develop gratitude, patience, resilience, confidence, affection, responsibility, and meaningful relationships. This shift is important because inclusive education should not merely provide access to schooling, but also create opportunities for children to experience growth, belonging, and self-worth [14, 22, 23].

In this context, Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology can be integrated as complementary frameworks. Islamic Religious Education provides moral and spiritual foundations, while positive psychology provides concepts for understanding well-being, flourishing, resilience, optimism, gratitude, engagement, and positive relationships. Together, they can support an educational model that moves beyond deficit correction toward flourishing.

### 3.2. Islamic religious education as a space for moral and spiritual strength

Islamic Religious Education has a strategic role in supporting the holistic development of children with special needs. It is not only concerned with religious knowledge, worship practices, or doctrinal understanding, but also with the formation of moral character, spiritual awareness, emotional regulation, and social responsibility. For children with special needs, these dimensions are particularly important because they may experience repeated barriers in communication, social participation, learning achievement, and self-confidence [24].

The review indicates that Islamic values can function as sources of psychological and moral strength. The value of *syukur* or gratitude can help children learn to appreciate support, recognize positive experiences, and develop a sense of contentment. The value of *sabar* or patience can support persistence, emotional control, and resilience when facing learning difficulties. The value of *tawakkal* or trust in God can provide a sense of security, meaning, and hope. The value of *husnuzan* or positive thinking can encourage optimism and reduce negative self-perception. Meanwhile, *rahmah* or compassion can strengthen empathy, kindness, and positive relationships.

These values are highly relevant for children with special needs because religious learning can help them develop inner strength and moral orientation. However, these values should not be taught only as abstract concepts. Many children with special needs require concrete examples, repetition, visual support, direct practice, emotional reinforcement, and meaningful routines. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education must be adapted to children's developmental levels, communication abilities, sensory needs, and emotional conditions.

For example, gratitude can be taught through simple daily reflection, thanking parents or teachers, appreciating small achievements, and recognizing blessings in everyday life. Patience can be introduced through short stories, guided practice, and positive reinforcement when children complete difficult tasks. Compassion can be developed through classroom activities such as helping friends, sharing materials, greeting others politely, and showing care. In this sense, Islamic Religious Education becomes a lived experience rather than only a subject to be memorized [20, 21, 25].

### 3.3. Positive psychology as a framework for flourishing

Positive psychology provides a useful lens for understanding the developmental needs of children with special needs. Its central concern is not only how to reduce problems, but how to develop positive emotions, strengths, meaning, engagement, relationships, and accomplishment. For children with special needs, this perspective is important because education should support their capacity to experience a meaningful and dignified life according to their abilities [16, 26, 27].

The concept of flourishing is particularly relevant. Flourishing does not mean that children are free from limitations or difficulties. Rather, it refers to the possibility of living with positive emotions, meaningful relationships, resilience, self-confidence, and personal growth despite challenges. This concept is compatible with inclusive education because it recognizes that every child can develop, participate, and experience well-being when learning environments are supportive.

Positive psychology also helps educators avoid a narrow focus on academic achievement. For children with special needs, progress may

be seen in small but meaningful forms: being able to greet others, express gratitude, regulate emotions, participate in worship routines, complete simple tasks, help a friend, or show confidence in classroom activities. These forms of development should be recognized as important indicators of learning and character formation [14, 22, 23].

When connected with Islamic Religious Education, positive psychology can strengthen the emotional and motivational dimensions of religious learning. Islamic Religious Education can provide meaning, values, and spiritual direction, while positive psychology can help teachers design learning experiences that promote joy, confidence, resilience, and positive relationships. This integration creates a more humanizing approach to religious education for children with special needs.

### 3.4. Conceptual integration of islamic values and positive psychology

The integration between Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology can be understood through the convergence between Islamic values and psychological strengths. Several Islamic values are conceptually aligned with positive psychology constructs. *Syukur* corresponds to gratitude, *sabar* corresponds to resilience and emotional regulation, *tawakkal* corresponds to meaning and trust, *husnuzan* corresponds to optimism, and *rahmah* corresponds to positive relationships and compassion [28, 29].

This convergence does not mean that Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology are identical. Islamic Religious Education is rooted in religious and spiritual foundations, while positive psychology is developed within psychological and educational science. However, both can support similar educational goals, particularly the development of well-being, character, and human potential.

The integration may be implemented through several pedagogical principles. First, teachers should use strength-based language. Instead of focusing only on what children cannot do, teachers can highlight effort, improvement, kindness, patience, and participation. Second, teachers should create meaningful routines. Simple religious routines, such as greetings, short prayers, reflection, and moral storytelling, can help children develop emotional stability and spiritual familiarity. Third, teachers should use positive reinforcement. Praise, encouragement, and appreciation can help children associate religious learning with positive experiences. Fourth, teachers should provide adaptive instruction. Religious concepts should be presented through simple language, visual media, concrete examples, gestures, stories, songs, role play, or multisensory activities depending on children's needs.

Through these strategies, Islamic Religious Education can become a strength-based learning space. It can help children with special needs not only learn religious values but also experience themselves as capable, valued, and meaningful individuals [14, 22, 23].

### 3.5. Toward a flourishing-oriented islamic religious education model

Based on the conceptual synthesis, this study proposes a flourishing-oriented model of Islamic Religious Education for children with special needs. This model consists of four interconnected components: recognizing dignity, nurturing strengths, adapting religious learning, and supporting flourishing [24].

The first component is recognizing dignity. Every child with special needs should be viewed as a learner with inherent worth. This principle is essential because deficit-based education may unintentionally reduce children to their limitations. Islamic Religious Education should begin with the belief that every child has value, potential, and the right to meaningful religious learning.

The second component is nurturing strengths. Teachers should identify and encourage children's positive qualities, such as effort, kindness, patience, curiosity, cooperation, and persistence. Strengths may appear differently in each child. For one child, strength may be shown through the ability to sit calmly during a short prayer. For another child, it may be shown through helping a friend, expressing gratitude, or participating in a simple worship routine [19–21].

The third component is adapting religious learning. Islamic Religious Education should be accessible to children with diverse needs. Teachers need to simplify materials, provide visual or concrete support, repeat key ideas, use stories, create routines, and adjust expectations according to children's abilities. Adaptation does not mean reducing the value of religious education. Rather, it means making religious learning meaningful and reachable for every child.

The fourth component is supporting flourishing. The ultimate goal of the model is not only religious knowledge acquisition, but the development of well-being, self-confidence, resilience, positive relationships, and moral character. In this model, children flourish when they feel accepted, supported, spiritually connected, emotionally secure, and able to participate meaningfully in learning and social life.

This model can be illustrated as a movement from deficit-based support to flourishing. The process begins by recognizing the limitations of deficit-based thinking, then strengthening Islamic Religious Education with positive psychology, and finally creating learning experiences that support dignity, resilience, gratitude, optimism, and holistic development.

### 3.6. Pedagogical strategies for children with special needs

The integration of Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology requires practical pedagogical strategies. These strategies should be adaptive, emotionally supportive, and strength-oriented. One important strategy is moral storytelling. Stories of prophets, companions, or everyday moral situations can be used to teach patience, gratitude, honesty, compassion, and persistence. For children with special needs, stories should be presented with simple language, pictures, gestures, repetition, and direct connection to daily life [19–21].

Another strategy is reflective routine. Reflection does not need to be complex. Teachers may ask children to identify one good thing they experienced, one person they want to thank, or one kind action they performed. This simple routine can develop gratitude, self-awareness, and positive emotion.

Positive reinforcement is also essential. Teachers should recognize small achievements and efforts. For children who often experience failure, appreciation can build motivation and self-confidence. Reinforcement should focus not only on academic performance but also on effort, patience, kindness, participation, and emotional control. Adaptive worship habituation can also support character development. Children may be guided to participate in religious routines according to their abilities, such as saying short prayers, following prayer movements, listening to moral stories, practicing greetings, or maintaining cleanliness. These routines can strengthen spiritual familiarity, discipline, and emotional stability.

Inclusive interaction is another important strategy. Teachers should create opportunities for children with special needs to interact positively with peers. Activities such as greeting, sharing, helping, and group storytelling can strengthen positive relationships. This is important because flourishing is not only individual but also relational.

### 3.7. Challenges in implementation

Although the integration of Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology offers strong potential, several challenges may arise in practice. First, teachers may not yet be familiar with positive psychology concepts. Many teachers understand religious education and character education, but may not know how to connect them with well-being, resilience, optimism, gratitude, and flourishing [19–21].

Second, teachers may have limited experience in adapting Islamic Religious Education for children with different needs. Children with autism, intellectual disabilities, hearing impairment, visual impairment, or emotional-behavioral difficulties require different strategies. Without adequate training, teachers may use one general approach for all children. Third, school culture may still be influenced by deficit-based thinking. Children with special needs may be viewed mainly as students who need correction or assistance. This mindset may limit opportunities for children to express strengths and participate meaningfully.

Fourth, the integration of religious education and positive psychology requires collaboration among teachers, parents, special education teachers, school leaders, and sometimes psychologists or therapists. Without collaboration, the values taught at school may not be consistently supported at home. Fifth, there is a need for learning materials that are both religiously meaningful and developmentally accessible. Many Islamic Religious Education materials are still text-based and abstract. Children with special needs may need visual, concrete, simplified, and interactive materials [30].

The findings of this conceptual review suggest that Islamic Religious Education for children with special needs should move beyond a purely instructional model. It should be understood as a holistic educational process that supports moral, spiritual, emotional, and social development. By integrating positive psychology, Islamic Religious

Education can be directed toward flourishing, not merely toward knowledge transmission or behavioral correction.

This approach also repositions children with special needs as active and valuable learners. They are not merely recipients of support, but individuals with strengths, emotions, spirituality, relationships, and potential for growth. Such a perspective is important for building inclusive education that respects dignity and diversity. The integration of Islamic values and positive psychology provides a meaningful bridge between religious education and psychological well-being. Values such as gratitude, patience, trust, optimism, compassion, and sincerity can be taught not only as moral obligations but also as sources of psychological strength. This makes Islamic Religious Education more relevant to the lived experiences of children with special needs [3, 11].

The proposed flourishing-oriented approach also has implications for teachers. Teachers need to become facilitators of positive growth. They should not only deliver religious content, but also create learning environments that promote encouragement, acceptance, emotional safety, meaningful participation, and positive relationships. This requires pedagogical sensitivity, creativity, patience, and collaboration.

Overall, this study argues that Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology can work together to create a more humane, inclusive, and strength-based model of education for children with special needs. The model does not ignore learning barriers, but it refuses to define children only by those barriers. Instead, it emphasizes dignity, strengths, meaning, and flourishing as central goals of religious and inclusive education [31].

## 4. Conclusion

This study has developed a conceptual understanding of how Islamic Religious Education can be integrated with positive psychology to support the holistic development of children with special needs. The main argument of this article is that education for children with special needs should not be limited to deficit-based support, remediation, or barrier reduction. Although adaptive assistance remains necessary, children with special needs also require learning experiences that recognize their dignity, strengthen their positive qualities, and support their emotional, moral, spiritual, and social development.

The conceptual review shows that Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology can complement each other in promoting flourishing. Islamic Religious Education provides moral and spiritual foundations through values such as *syukur*, *sabar*, *tawakkal*, *husnuzan*, *rahmah*, sincerity, and moral responsibility. Positive psychology provides a framework for understanding well-being, resilience, gratitude, optimism, meaning, engagement, self-confidence, and positive relationships. When these two perspectives are integrated, Islamic Religious Education can become a strength-based and inclusive learning space that helps children with special needs develop not only religious knowledge, but also psychological strength and positive character.

The proposed flourishing-oriented approach emphasizes four key components: recognizing the dignity of every child, nurturing individual strengths, adapting religious learning to diverse needs, and supporting holistic development. In practice, this approach can be implemented through moral storytelling, reflective routines, positive reinforcement, adaptive worship habituation, emotional support, and inclusive interaction. These strategies allow Islamic Religious Education to become more accessible, meaningful, and responsive to the lived experiences of children with special needs.

However, the implementation of this approach requires teacher readiness, adaptive pedagogical skills, supportive school culture, accessible learning materials, and collaboration among teachers, parents, special education professionals, and school leaders. Without these supports, the integration of Islamic Religious Education and positive psychology may remain only a conceptual ideal. Therefore, schools and teacher education institutions need to strengthen professional development programs that help teachers design religious learning experiences that are both spiritually meaningful and psychologically supportive.

This study contributes to the development of a strength-based perspective in Islamic Religious Education for children with special needs. It proposes that religious education should move beyond knowledge transmission and behavioral correction toward dignity, resilience, well-being, and flourishing. The limitation of this study lies in its conceptual literature review design, which does not include direct empirical data from classrooms, teachers, parents, or children with special needs. Future research is recommended to examine this conceptual model through qualitative case studies, teacher interviews, classroom observations, or intervention-based studies. Further empirical research is also needed to explore how Islamic Religious Education based on positive psychology can be adapted for different categories of special needs, such as autism, intellectual disabilities, hearing impairment, visual impairment, and emotional or behavioral difficulties.

In conclusion, integrating Islamic Religious Education with positive psychology offers a promising pathway for developing a more humane, inclusive, and strength-based educational model. This approach recognizes children with special needs not merely as learners with limitations, but as individuals with dignity, potential, spirituality, emotions, relationships, and the capacity to flourish.

### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Mashdaria Huwaina:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Software, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **M. Ubaidillah Ridwanulloh:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Software, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis. **Muhamad Yasin:** Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing, Investigation.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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