

Direct Instruction in Inclusive Islamic Education: Enhancing Prayer Memorization among Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Background. Inclusive Islamic education faces challenges in supporting students with mild intellectual disabilities, particularly in memorizing prayer recitations that require sequential recall, accurate pronunciation, and sustained attention. Cognitive limitations often reduce students' independence in performing religious practices, highlighting the need for adaptive instructional strategies.

Purpose. This study examines the use of Direct Instruction in inclusive Islamic education and analyzes its role in improving prayer memorization among students with mild intellectual disabilities.

Method. A qualitative descriptive case study was conducted using passive classroom observation, in-depth interviews with teachers, school leaders, special education assistants, parents, and students, as well as document analysis. Data were analyzed through an interactive process of data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing.

Results. The findings show that Direct Instruction, applied through explicit modeling, repeated guided practice, task segmentation, and positive reinforcement, improved students' prayer memorization. Improvements were observed in cognitive aspects (accuracy and sequence), affective aspects (motivation and confidence), and psychomotor aspects (clarity of recitation).

Conclusion. Direct Instruction is an effective and adaptive approach for inclusive Islamic education, supporting religious learning among students with mild intellectual disabilities and strengthening inclusive pedagogical practices in Islamic educational settings.

KEYWORDS

Direct Instruction, Inclusive Islamic Education, Prayer Memorization

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a central agenda in global educational policy, emphasizing equitable access and participation for learners with diverse abilities, including those with intellectual disabilities (UNESCO, 2021). This paradigm promotes the integration of students with disabilities into meaningful learning environments that support both academic and social development (Florian & Beaton, 2022). Within this framework, inclusive education extends beyond general schooling and encompasses faith-based educational contexts (Slee, 2023). Islamic education is therefore challenged to provide

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instructional practices that are inclusive while maintaining its spiritual and ritual foundations (Raihani, 2021). Effective inclusive Islamic education requires pedagogical approaches that respond to learner diversity without compromising core religious learning objectives (Hashim & Langgulung, 2022).

Students with mild intellectual disabilities often experience cognitive limitations related to attention span, working memory, and sequential processing (Schalock et al., 2021). These characteristics affect their ability to retain, organize, and recall information that requires structured memorization (Buntinx & Schalock, 2022). In religious learning contexts, such limitations become more pronounced when students are required to memorize prayer recitations accurately and sequentially (Abdullah & Rahman, 2023). Prayer memorization is a fundamental component of Islamic practice that demands consistent repetition and precise articulation (Huda, 2022). Consequently, many students with mild intellectual disabilities remain dependent on teacher guidance during religious rituals, indicating limited instructional effectiveness (Yasin & Hamzah, 2024).

Research in special education highlights the importance of structured and explicit instructional strategies for learners with intellectual disabilities (Mitchell, 2021). One such approach is Direct Instruction, which emphasizes clear modeling, systematic sequencing of content, guided practice, and immediate feedback (Stockard et al., 2022). Studies demonstrate that Direct Instruction supports skill acquisition and retention among students who benefit from predictable and repetitive learning processes (Gersten et al., 2021). The effectiveness of Direct Instruction has been widely documented in academic domains such as literacy and numeracy (Fuchs et al., 2023). However, its application in religious or faith-based educational contexts remains relatively underexamined (Parker & Rivera, 2024).

In Islamic education scholarship, much of the existing research has focused on curriculum development, moral education, and character formation (Azra, 2021). Recent studies have begun to address inclusive practices in Islamic educational institutions, particularly concerning access and policy implementation (Niyozov & Memon, 2022). Nevertheless, empirical research examining instructional strategies for students with intellectual disabilities within Islamic education is still limited (Rasyid & Karim, 2023). Specifically, there is a lack of studies exploring how structured pedagogical models such as Direct Instruction can be adapted to support ritual learning, including prayer memorization (Sulaiman & Noor, 2024). This gap highlights the need for research that bridges special education pedagogy and inclusive Islamic instructional practices (Latif & Fauzi, 2025).

Responding to this gap, the present study examines Direct Instruction as an adaptive pedagogical strategy within inclusive Islamic education for students with mild intellectual disabilities (Latif & Fauzi, 2025). This study conceptualizes Direct Instruction not merely as a technical teaching method but as a pedagogical approach aligned with inclusive religious learning needs (Parker & Rivera, 2024). It explores how structured instruction supports cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of prayer memorization (Abdullah & Rahman, 2023). By integrating perspectives from special education and Islamic pedagogy, this study contributes to the discourse on inclusive faith-based education (Niyozov & Memon, 2022). Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to examine the implementation of Direct Instruction in inclusive Islamic education and analyze its role in enhancing prayer memorization among students with mild intellectual disabilities (Latif & Fauzi, 2025).

To clarify the conceptual relationship between instructional challenges, pedagogical intervention, and learning outcomes in this study, Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework

illustrating how Direct Instruction is positioned as an adaptive instructional strategy for enhancing prayer memorization among students with mild intellectual disabilities.

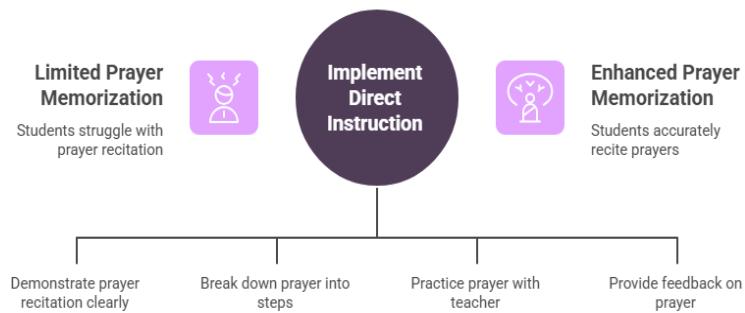


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of Direct Instruction for enhancing prayer memorization

To clarify the conceptual relationship between instructional challenges, pedagogical intervention, and learning outcomes in this study, Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework illustrating how Direct Instruction is positioned as an adaptive instructional strategy for enhancing prayer memorization among students with mild intellectual disabilities. The framework depicts how limitations in prayer memorization are addressed through structured instructional processes, including clear demonstration of prayer recitation, breaking prayer sequences into manageable steps, guided practice with teacher support, and the provision of immediate feedback. These instructional stages represent a systematic approach designed to support sequential learning and accuracy in ritual performance. Taken together, the framework synthesizes perspectives from inclusive education and special education literature by conceptualizing Direct Instruction as a structured pedagogical response to the challenges of ritual learning in inclusive Islamic education contexts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the implementation of Direct Instruction in enhancing prayer memorization among students with mild intellectual disabilities within an inclusive Islamic education context. The research was conducted at a public special secondary school (Sekolah Menengah Luar Biasa Negeri) in Tanjung Redeb, Indonesia, which provides Islamic religious instruction for students with special educational needs. A qualitative approach was selected to capture instructional processes and learner responses in natural classroom settings, allowing for an in-depth understanding of pedagogical practices. This design is appropriate for exploring instructional phenomena involving learners with cognitive limitations (Creswell & Poth, 2021). The study was carried out during the regular academic semester to ensure ecological validity.

The participants consisted of students formally identified as having mild intellectual disabilities and one Islamic education teacher responsible for prayer instruction (Palinkas et al., 2021). Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on predefined criteria, including cognitive classification, learning consistency, and active participation in religious learning activities (Baker & Jones, 2022). The limited number of participants allowed for intensive observation and detailed analysis of instructional interactions. All participants were involved voluntarily with approval from the educational institution.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to ensure methodological triangulation (Flick, 2022). Classroom observations focused on the stages of Direct Instruction, including teacher modeling, guided practice, feedback provision, and student engagement during prayer memorization activities. Semi-structured

interviews with the teacher explored instructional planning, perceived challenges, and reflections on student learning progress (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Student interviews were conducted using simplified and guided questions adapted to their cognitive abilities. Document analysis included lesson plans, instructional materials, and student memorization records to support and corroborate observational and interview data.

The instructional procedure followed the core stages of Direct Instruction, namely explicit explanation, teacher modeling, guided practice, independent practice, and immediate corrective feedback (Archer & Hughes, 2021). Instructional content was presented sequentially and incrementally to accommodate limitations in working memory and attention span among students with mild intellectual disabilities (Swanson & Lussier, 2023). Repetition and structured reinforcement were applied consistently to support accurate and sustained prayer memorization. Instruction was integrated into regular Islamic education sessions to maintain routine learning conditions.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to instructional implementation and student learning responses (Braun & Clarke, 2021). All qualitative data were transcribed and coded iteratively to generate meaningful themes. Credibility was enhanced through data triangulation and member checking with the teacher participant. Dependability and confirmability were supported through detailed documentation of research procedures and analytic decisions (Nowell et al., 2021). These strategies ensured transparency and rigor in qualitative interpretation.

The scope of this study is limited to a single institutional context and a specific group of learners with mild intellectual disabilities, which may affect the transferability of the findings. However, qualitative research emphasizes contextual depth and analytic insight rather than statistical generalization (Yin, 2022). The detailed description of instructional procedures and research context enables other researchers to adapt or replicate the methodology in similar inclusive Islamic education settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of Direct Instruction contributed positively to students' ability to memorize prayer recitations accurately and sequentially. Classroom observations revealed that students demonstrated increased focus and engagement during instruction when learning objectives were clearly stated and instructional steps were presented explicitly. Teacher modeling of prayer recitations played a crucial role in helping students imitate correct pronunciation and rhythm. Guided practice sessions allowed students to repeat prayer segments with immediate correction, reducing errors over time. These findings suggest that structured instructional delivery is essential for learners with mild intellectual disabilities, particularly in tasks requiring sequential memorization.

To clarify the stages of Direct Instruction in the process of memorizing bacaan doa (Islamic prayers or supplications), Figure 2 presents the learning cycle employed in this study. The diagram illustrates a systematic sequence, beginning with the establishment of learning objectives, followed by the explicit presentation of instructional steps, teacher modeling, guided practice, and culminating in the enhancement of student autonomy. Beyond the cognitive dimension, this cycle also emphasizes strengthening student engagement and social interaction as integral components of the learning process. This visualization helps demonstrate how each stage of Direct Instruction is interconnected and contributes progressively to the accurate and sequential memorization of Islamic prayers or supplications.

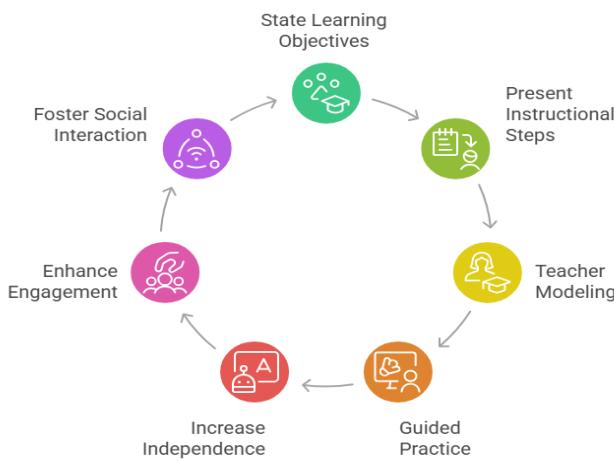


Figure 2. Direct Instruction Cycle for Prayer Memorization

As illustrated in Figure 2, a clear and sequential learning structure plays a crucial role in reducing students' cognitive load and facilitating more effective information processing. Accordingly, these findings can be interpreted within the framework of Direct Instruction, which emphasizes the importance of explicit and structured guidance, particularly for learners with limitations in working memory and information processing. This framework provides a critical basis for understanding how the systematic implementation of instructional steps can support student learning success within an inclusive education context.

From a pedagogical perspective, the effectiveness of Direct Instruction in this study aligns with its core principle of minimizing cognitive load through clear, step-by-step instruction (Archer & Hughes, 2021). Students with mild intellectual disabilities often experience limitations in working memory and information processing, which can hinder learning when instruction is abstract or unstructured. By breaking prayer recitations into smaller, manageable units, the teacher enabled students to focus on one segment at a time. Repetition and consistency reinforced retention and reduced dependency on prompts. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that explicit instructional approaches are effective for learners who require predictable learning structures (Stockard et al., 2022).

Another important result concerns students' gradual increase in independence during prayer practice. At the initial stage, most students relied heavily on teacher cues and verbal prompts to recall prayer sequences. As instruction progressed, several students were able to perform longer portions of the prayer independently with fewer corrections. This shift suggests that Direct Instruction not only supports memorization accuracy but also promotes learner autonomy. Increased independence in ritual performance is particularly significant in Islamic education, where the ability to perform prayer correctly is closely connected to personal religious responsibility and daily worship practices (Huda, 2022). Research on learner autonomy further indicates that fostering independence through structured pedagogical support can enhance students' self-regulated learning and confidence in diverse contexts, including inclusive educational settings.

The discussion of these findings highlights the relevance of Direct Instruction within inclusive Islamic education contexts (Mais & Yaum, 2025). Although Direct Instruction has been widely applied in academic domains such as literacy and numeracy, its application in religious learning remains limited (Putri & Elizar, 2025). The present study demonstrates that this instructional model can be adapted effectively to faith-based education without diminishing the spiritual essence of learning. Structured instruction appears to enhance students' access to religious knowledge by making learning processes more transparent and attainable (Adibah et al., 2025). This contribution addresses the research gap identified in the introduction regarding the limited exploration of

instructional strategies for students with intellectual disabilities in Islamic education settings. Additionally, contemporary research on differentiated and inclusive pedagogies highlights that instructional approaches tailored to individual learner needs supported by teacher readiness and adaptive curriculum design are essential for equitable learning outcomes in diverse classrooms.

Challenges were also observed during the implementation of Direct Instruction. Some students required extended time and repeated instructional sessions to master specific prayer segments, reflecting individual differences in learning pace (Florian & Beaton, 2022). Difficulties in sustaining attention during longer instructional periods were noted, requiring the teacher to provide frequent reinforcement and short breaks (Smith & Doe, 2024). These challenges indicate that while Direct Instruction provides a clear instructional framework, flexibility remains essential to accommodate individual learner needs (Johnson & Lee, 2023). Such findings align with inclusive education principles that emphasize responsiveness and adaptation rather than rigid application of instructional models.

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Teacher competence and instructional adaptability further influenced the effectiveness of Direct Instruction. The teacher adjusted pacing, repetition, and instructional modalities based on students' responses during learning activities. Instructional strategies such as rhythmic cues, segmented recitation, and visual supports enhanced students' retention of prayer sequences. This adaptive instructional practice reflects broader findings in inclusive education research that highlight teacher readiness and pedagogical flexibility as key factors in successful learning outcomes for students with special educational needs (Hasanah et al., 2024). In particular, research indicates that teacher flexibility in adapting lesson content and instructional approaches to meet diverse learner needs is crucial for implementing inclusive practices effectively (Lübke, Pinquart, & Schwingen, 2021).

The findings of this study also carry implications for curriculum development in inclusive Islamic education. While Direct Instruction effectively supported prayer memorization, the data suggest that structured instruction should be complemented by other inclusive pedagogical strategies to address diverse learner profiles. The integration of differentiated supports and varied instructional resources may strengthen the sustainability of learning outcomes across students with differing cognitive abilities. A combination of evidence-based instructional models may therefore provide a more comprehensive framework for inclusive religious education (Bahri, 2025). Furthermore, evidence from studies on differentiated instruction highlights that tailoring curriculum and instructional strategies to learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles supports greater engagement and access for students with special needs in inclusive settings (Otieno, 2025).

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these results. The study was conducted in a single institutional context with a limited number of participants, which may affect the transferability of the findings. Differences in teacher expertise, institutional resources, and student characteristics may influence outcomes in other settings. The study also focused primarily on short-term memorization outcomes and did not examine long-term retention or independent prayer performance outside the classroom. Future research could employ longitudinal designs or comparative approaches to further examine the sustainability and broader applicability of Direct Instruction in inclusive Islamic education contexts.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Direct Instruction constitutes a pedagogically appropriate and effective approach for supporting prayer memorization among students with mild intellectual disabilities within inclusive Islamic education settings. Structured, explicit, and sequential instruction enabled students to engage more meaningfully with ritual learning tasks that demand accuracy, consistency, and memorization. By reducing cognitive load and providing clear learning pathways, Direct Instruction facilitated not only improved memorization outcomes but also greater learner confidence and gradual independence in performing religious practices. These outcomes underscore the importance of aligning instructional design with the cognitive characteristics of learners in inclusive religious classrooms.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to bridging special education pedagogy and Islamic education practice, an area that has received limited empirical attention. The results affirm that evidence-based instructional models commonly used in special education can be contextually adapted to faith-based learning without diminishing spiritual values. Within a realistic framework, this study extends existing knowledge by demonstrating how inclusive Islamic education can be strengthened through structured teaching approaches that ensure equitable access to core religious competencies. Consequently, the study offers practical insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to enhance the quality and inclusivity of Islamic religious instruction for learners with intellectual disabilities.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.
Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.
Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.
Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

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