

Pesantren-Based Inclusive TPQ: A Model for Empowering Quranic Education for Children with Special Needs

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Abstract

Quranic education for children with special needs (CSN) remains a neglected domain within Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, including at the level of Quranic Learning Centers (TPQ). This article documents and analyzes community service activities in the form of establishing TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak in Sukoharjo Village, Margorejo District, Pati Regency, Central Java—the first inclusive TPQ in Pati Regency. The program was pioneered in October 2022 by a lecturer from the Arabic Language Education Study Program at Institut Pesantren Mathaliul Falah (IPMAFA) Pati, in collaboration with student volunteers, Special Education School (SLB) teachers, and institutional support from BAZNAS and the community. Using Participatory Action Research (PAR) and community empowerment approaches, the program designs Quranic learning models tailored to visually impaired, deaf, and speech-impaired learners. Learning media developed include Braille Mushaf, Braille Iqra', sign language Quran, audio media, and humanistic individual mentoring. Results show: (1) the establishment of Pati's first inclusive Quranic learning system with 50 students; (2) the emergence of a multi-stakeholder collaborative model among higher education institutions, SLB, BAZNAS, and the community; (3) enhanced competency of IPMAFA students as inclusive da'wah agents; (4) growing public awareness of the religious education rights of CSN. More importantly, the program produced tangible and continuing impacts for the learners themselves: visually impaired students became able to read the Braille Quran and memorize up to several juz through multi-sensory methods, while deaf and speech-impaired students gained the ability to "recite" the Quran through sign language, alongside a restored sense of belonging within the Muslim community. These impacts are designed to be sustainable through a productive-zakat funding scheme (BAZNAS), structured volunteer regeneration, and institutionalized collaboration with the SLB. The novelty lies in an integrative model combining pesantren tradition, inclusive Islamic education, and

community-based disability empowerment—a dimension underexplored in Indonesian Islamic community service literature.

Keywords: *Inclusive TPQ; Inclusive Islamic Education; Children with Special Needs; Pesantren; Community Empowerment*

Introduction

Inclusive education is important because it is the most concrete embodiment of the principle that every human being possesses equal dignity and an equal right to grow, learn, and participate fully in social and religious life. Inclusive education is not merely about placing children with special needs (CSN) in the same room as their peers; it is about transforming institutions, methods, and attitudes so that every learner—regardless of ability—is genuinely accepted, valued, and given access that matches their needs (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; UNESCO, 2009). For CSN in particular, inclusive education breaks the cycle of marginalization: it nurtures self-confidence, social belonging, and the cognitive and spiritual development that segregated or absent provision would otherwise deny them. In the specific domain of religious education, the stakes are even higher because access to Quranic learning touches a child's spiritual identity and their recognized membership in the Muslim community. It is precisely because of this importance that the right to inclusive education has been firmly enshrined in law.

The right to education is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Indonesian Constitution. Article 31(1) of the 1945 Constitution affirms that every citizen is entitled to education without exception. This affirmation is reinforced by Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which, in Article 5(2), explicitly guarantees the right of children with special needs (CSN) to receive special educational services. Furthermore, Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities confirms the state's obligation to ensure accessible and inclusive education for persons with disabilities. At the international level, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires signatory states to ensure inclusive education systems at every level.

However, this normative guarantee is often not aligned with field realities. In the context of Islamic religious education in particular, children with special needs face layered exclusivity: structural exclusivity due to the scarcity of accommodating institutions, pedagogical exclusivity due to the absence of trained teachers, and social exclusivity due to stigma that still exists in some Muslim communities. *Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an (TPQ)*, which has historically been the institution closest to basic religious education in society,

has almost no inclusive variant that accommodates CSN. Existing research shows that very few TPQs in Indonesia have curricula, methods, or learning media that are disability-friendly (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2016).

In Pati Regency, Central Java, this condition is particularly felt. As a regency with a population of approximately 1.2 million and a strong Muslim community base—with a deep-rooted pesantren tradition dating back to the era of Sheik Ahmad Mutamakkin—Pati should be a locus for inclusive Islamic education empowerment. Yet field facts reveal the contrary: before 2022, not a single TPQ in Pati Regency specifically or inclusively served children with disabilities such as visual impairment, deafness, and speech impairment. These children, although living in devout Muslim environments, did not receive adequate access to Quranic education and basic Islamic knowledge.

This issue is not merely about physical accessibility, but concerns the depth of Islamic values regarding inclusion. Islam, as a religion of mercy for all creation (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*), should not allow any group to be marginalized from the process of religious education. The pesantren tradition, rich in humanistic and transformative values, has great potential to become a driver of inclusive *da'wah*—yet this potential has not been widely actualized programmatically for persons with disabilities. A review of existing literature reveals a clear research gap. First, most studies on Quranic learning for persons with disabilities focus on a single type of impairment—most commonly the visually impaired through Braille methods (Falah Amelia et al., 2024; Hindatulatifah, 2017) or the deaf through sign-language and *Iqra'* adaptations (Rouf, 2021)—rather than an institution that serves multiple disability categories simultaneously. Second, such provision has largely been delivered by specialized foundations, rehabilitation centers, or *panti* concentrated in large cities, leaving community-level institutions like TPQ—the religious institution closest to ordinary Muslim families—almost entirely without inclusive variants (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2016). Third, although the study of pesantren and community service has been explored in prior literature published in this journal (Mubarok, Zakiyah, & Khofifah, 2022; Syahlan, Imron, Zulfa, & Shobirin, 2019), and although Islamic scholarship on disability has advanced conceptually through works on *fikih difabel* and disability-friendly mosques (Maftuhin, 2021; Maftuhin & Muflihati, 2022), none of these has examined an operational model that integrates the pesantren tradition, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and productive-zakat financing to deliver inclusive Quranic education for children with diverse special needs. It is this threefold gap—mono-disability focus, institutional distance from the community, and the absence of an integrated pesantren-based model—that justifies raising this topic as a scholarly article.

This article responds to that gap. By documenting and analyzing the community service program of establishing and developing TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak in Pati Regency, this article seeks to offer a service model that transcends the boundaries of an activity report—namely, a critical reflection on how the pesantren tradition, academic spirit of higher education, and community solidarity can synergize to form an inclusive, humanistic, and sustainable Quranic education ecosystem.

The theories underpinning this study include: (1) inclusive education theory emphasizing equal access and adaptation of the learning system (Booth & Ainscow, 2016); (2) community empowerment theory viewing the community as an active subject of social change (Ife, 2013); (3) humanistic Islamic education that places humanity as an intrinsic value in the learning process (Rahman, 1982); and (4) the participatory action research (PAR) framework that makes community participation the methodological basis of service (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

Building on—but moving beyond—these four theoretical strands, the novelty of this article lies in synthesizing them into a single operational model that the existing literature has not yet articulated. Whereas inclusive education theory (Booth & Ainscow) and community empowerment theory (Ife) are generally applied to secular or formal schooling, and humanistic Islamic education (Rahman) tends to remain at the level of philosophical discourse, this study integrates all three—through a PAR process—into a concrete, community-rooted institution: a pesantren-based inclusive TPQ. The originality is therefore not in the individual theories but in their convergence: an inclusive Quranic-education model that simultaneously (a) grounds itself in the pesantren tradition of service (*khidmah*) and care for the weak, (b) operationalizes multi-stakeholder collaboration among an Islamic higher-education institution, an SLB, BAZNAS, and the community, and (c) embeds productive zakat as the engine of sustainability. This convergence transforms abstract theory into a replicable practice and constitutes the article's distinctive contribution.

Methods

This community service program used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach that views the community not as an object of intervention, but as an active subject of change. PAR was chosen because the nature of the problem faced is multidimensional—involving pedagogical, social, religious, and economic aspects—thus requiring active involvement of all stakeholders (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). In addition to PAR, this program also adopted a collaborative empowerment framework emphasizing synergy among higher education institutions, local communities, and religious organizations.

Data in this article were collected through: (1) participatory observation during the learning process; (2) in-depth interviews with program founders, student volunteers, parents of students, and SLB partners; (3) activity documentation; (4) reflective journals from program implementers; and (5) program data from BAZNAS reports. The program proceeded in six interconnected and cyclical phases, consistent with the PAR principle that action and reflection are carried out repeatedly and sustainably.

Table 1. Phases of TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak Program Implementation

Phase	Main Activities	Description
Phase 1 (2021)	Needs Mapping	KKL of PBA IPMAFA students at SLB Pati; identification of CSN access problems to Quranic education; consultation with SLB Principal Mr. Sumarno
Phase 2 (Jan–Sep 2022)	Program Design	Literature review, adaptive curriculum design, stakeholder mapping, proposal submission to BAZNAS, and fundraising for Braille media
Phase 3 (Oct 2022)	TPQ Establishment	Launch of TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak in Sukoharjo Village; initial student recruitment; coordination with SLB Pati
Phase 4 (Oct 2022–present)	Volunteer Training	Training of IPMAFA students in reading and teaching the Braille Mushaf and the sign language Quran, with mentors from LPMQ
Phase 5 (Oct 2022–present)	Learning Implementation	Regular classes three times a week; individual mentoring; weekly collaboration with SLB teachers every Friday
Phase 6 (Ongoing)	Evaluation & Reflection	Evaluation of student learning outcomes; method reflection; curriculum adjustment; reporting to BAZNAS

Results

Partner Conditions and Problem Identification

Pati Regency has a Special Education School (SLB) that accommodates children with various types of disabilities: visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech impairment, physical disability, intellectual disability, and autism spectrum. The majority of SLB students come from devout Muslim families; yet ironically, they do not receive adequate Quranic education due to the absence of TPQs that can specifically serve their needs.

The turning point of this program originated from a Field Work Lecture (KKL) activity of IPMAFA PBA students at SLB Pati in 2021. At that time, the SLB Principal, Mr. Sumarno, conveyed his concern to IPMAFA lecturer Sahal Mahfudh about the urgent need for students to be able to read the Quran and understand basic religious obligations such as ablution and prayer. This concern from a school principal was not merely an administrative complaint—it was a reflection of a very real spiritual need from children who had long been marginalized from access to Quranic education.

Table 2. Identification of Problems of CSN Access to Quranic Education in Pati Regency

No.	Problem Aspect	Description
1	Absence of Inclusive TPQ	No TPQ in Pati Regency specifically accommodated CSN needs before 2022
2	Limited Learning Media	Teaching media such as Braille Mushaf, Braille Iqra', and sign language Quran were very scarce and unavailable in communities
3	Shortage of Trained HR	Conventional TPQ teachers lacked competency to teach CSN; SLB teachers did not always master Islamic knowledge
4	Social Stigma	Some communities believed CSN, especially severely disabled, did not need formal religious education as they were considered non-mukallaf
5	Funding Limitations	Inclusive education requires higher costs for media and teacher training, while CSN families are generally economically vulnerable

6	Socio-religious Isolation	CSN were often isolated from religious community activities, including pengajian and majelis taklim, deepening their exclusivity
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Establishment of TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak

TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak was officially established in October 2022 in Sukoharjo Village, Margorejo District, Pati Regency. The location was chosen strategically: Sukoharjo Village is directly adjacent to the SLB Pati complex, facilitating access for students who are mostly alumni or active students of that SLB. By utilizing SLB Pati's building facilities as a learning space, the program managed to minimize operational costs while strengthening the synergy between TPQ and SLB.

Table 3. Student Profile of TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak (2024 Data)

No.	Class	Type of Special Need	Number of Students	Primary Method
A	Class A	Visual impairment (some with mild autism)	20 students	Braille Mushaf, Braille Iqra', audio media
B	Class B	Hearing and speech impairment	30 students	Sign language, sign language Quran
C	Class C	Complex special needs (intensive)	Under development	Intensive individual mentoring
	TOTAL		50 active students	

Teaching Staff and Volunteers

Table 4. Teaching Staff Profile of TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak

No.	Category	Number	Role
1	Founding Lecturer (IPMAFA)	1 person	Program coordinator, main mentor, teacher for Classes A and B
2	Female Student Volunteers (IPMAFA)	4 persons	Regular teachers, individual mentoring, and program administration

3	SLB Pati Teachers	2 persons	Friday mentoring, technical consultation on CSN learning
4	LPMQ Mentors	Consultative	Training in reading and teaching Braille Mushaf and sign language
	TOTAL TEACHERS	7 active	

Learning Media

Table 5. Learning Media of TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak

No.	Learning Media	Target	Function
1	Braille Mushaf	Visually impaired	Quran reading medium in Braille script; obtained from community donations (IDR 9 million)
2	Braille Iqra'	Beginner visually impaired	Learning medium for reading hijaiyah letters for beginner visually impaired students
3	Sign Language Quran	Deaf/speech-impaired	Quran translation in the standardized Indonesian sign language system
4	Audio Media (Murattal Recording)	Visually impaired	Tartil Quran recordings for memorization and reinforcement
5	Adaptive Ubudiyah Module	All classes	Ablution, prayer, and basic worship modules adapted to each CSN's capacity
6	Individual Mentoring	All classes	One-on-one sessions for students with complex special needs

Learning Process and Dynamics

Learning at TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak proceeds with an adaptively designed rhythm. For visually impaired students in Class A, the learning process begins with the introduction of hijaiyah letters through Braille Iqra'—a Quran reading guide whose entire content has been converted into the

Braille dot system. The challenges faced in this class proved relatively easier than anticipated. As expressed by Sahal Mahfudh: "For visually impaired students, there are generally no significant obstacles; even with Quranic audio alone, they can already memorize Quranic verses." This reveals an interesting pedagogical fact: visual limitations do not diminish—and in many cases even sharpen—the auditory ability and memory of visually impaired children. The multi-sensory approach applied, combining touch (Braille) and hearing (audio), proved effective. Some students have even memorized the Quran up to the 9th juz.

By contrast, Class B for deaf and speech-impaired students presents its own complexity. Communication between teacher and student relies entirely on sign language, facial expressions, and visual contact. The Quranic sign language learning process involves mastering precise hand movements for every letter, word, and phrase of the Quran. SLB Pati teachers play a very vital role in this class, particularly in the Friday sessions that have become a "collaboration day" between TPQ teaching staff and SLB teachers. Every Friday, SLB Pati teachers attend to accompany the learning process at TPQ Al-Mubarak. This collaboration produces a rich synergy—SLB teachers bring CSN pedagogical expertise, while IPMAFA student volunteers bring depth of Islamic material knowledge.

Funding System and Sustainability

One key to the success of this program is a plural and collaborative funding model. BAZNAS Pati Regency is the backbone of operational financing—providing incentives for volunteers and financing the regular program. Beyond BAZNAS, the program receives support from community donations, particularly for the procurement of Braille Mushafs totaling IDR 9 million. This funding model not only provides a financial solution—it also contains a deep dimension of social empowerment. By involving BAZNAS as a zakat manager, the program symbolically affirms that religious education for CSN is a legitimate part of zakat distribution—as an empowerment effort for the weak and marginalized (*mustahiq*). This is a productive and contextual interpretation of zakat, aligned with social fiqh thinking long developed by Pati scholars.

Discussion

Novelty: Integration of Pesantren and Inclusive Education

In the landscape of Islamic community service studies in Indonesia, the model developed by TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak presents several significant novelties. First, this program is one of the few—if not the only—that

systematically integrates pesantren tradition with inclusive Islamic education for disability groups. Previous studies on pesantren and disability have generally focused on discursive acceptance, not on concrete program models (Daroni, 2018). Prior work published in *Dimas* journal on pesantren-based community service (Mubarok, Zakiyah, & Khofifah, 2022; Syahlan et al., 2019) has demonstrated the potential of pesantren as a social empowerment institution, yet neither specifically addressed inclusive Quranic education for CSN.

Second, this program offers a unique multi-stakeholder collaborative model: pesantren-based higher education (IPMAFA) as initiator and HR provider, SLB as technical partner and facility provider, BAZNAS as fund provider, LPMQ as technical mentor, and the community as donors. Such a collaborative structure is uncommon in Islamic religious education service programs, which are generally still single-actor. Third, the use of Arabic Language Education Study Program students as inclusive da'wah agents is also a breakthrough worth noting. In the community service literature, students are often positioned as "tools" of the program—not as subjects experiencing significant transformation. At TPQ Al-Mubarok, students are not merely volunteer workers; they are educator-agents experiencing a real process of competency formation and inclusive da'wah character development.

Social Impact

Before joining TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarok, the majority of the 50 students had no Quran reading knowledge at all—not because they did not want to, but because no one had taught them in ways they could access. After joining the program, visually impaired students demonstrated the ability to read the Braille Quran independently and even memorize several short verses through audio media. For deaf and speech-impaired students, the most significant achievement is their ability to "recite" the Quran through sign language—an achievement that spiritually carries great weight. Many students who previously experienced socio-religious isolation have found a space where they are accepted, recognized for their abilities, and treated as subjects—not objects of pity. The sense of belonging to the Muslim community that arises from this shared learning experience is invaluable social capital.

Compared to conventional TPQs, Al-Mubarok's model transcends the "standard teaching" paradigm intended for "normal" children. Conventional TPQs generally use one method for all students, while Al-Mubarok develops pedagogical differentiation based on the individual needs of each student. Compared to formal inclusive education models (inclusive schools), the inclusive TPQ approach has advantages in: (1) institutional flexibility—not bound by rigid curriculum regulations; (2) closeness to the community—

operating in familiar student environments; (3) richer spiritual dimension—since TPQ exclusively focuses on Quranic and Islamic education. Several international studies on Islamic inclusive education—such as those conducted by Slee (2018) in Southeast Asian Islamic education contexts, or Erevelles (2011) in disability studies—emphasize the importance of "politics of belonging" in inclusive education. Al-Mubarak's program indirectly implements this principle: it creates a space where CSN truly "belong" in the Muslim community, not merely "tolerated."

Challenges and Limitations

This program still faces several limitations that must be honestly acknowledged. In terms of reach, TPQ Al-Mubarak currently only serves children of elementary/junior high school age and has not reached CSN from higher levels. In terms of disability types, the program has not been able to accommodate severe autism, severe physical disability, and severe intellectual disability, due to limited trained HR. Sustainability challenges are also an issue to be anticipated. Dependence on student volunteers carries a high turnover risk—when students graduate, the program requires continuous recruitment and training of new volunteers. A systematic and planned regeneration system is an urgent need.

Documentation

The following photographs document key activities at TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak, providing visual evidence of the program's implementation and impact.



Figure 1. Students of TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak (Class for Deaf and Speech-Impaired) Receiving Iqra' Isyarat & Juz' Amma Isyarat Grants from BAZNAS in Collaboration with LPMQ Kemenag RI



Figure 2. Students of TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak (Visually Impaired Class) Receiving Iqra' and Braille Mushaf Grants from BAZNAS RI



Figure 3. Teaching Staff (Dewan Asatidz) of TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak

Conclusion and Suggestion

Returning to the objective set out at the beginning of this article—namely, to offer a Quranic-education service model that transcends an activity report and demonstrates how the pesantren tradition, the academic spirit of higher education, and community solidarity can synergize into an inclusive, humanistic, and sustainable ecosystem—this study confirms that the objective has been met. TPQ Inklusi Al-Mubarak Pati is a social experiment that has successfully proven that inclusive Quranic education is not merely a normative dream, but something that can be built, operated, and developed. From a conversation between a lecturer and an SLB principal during a field work lecture, an institution now serves 50 children with special needs who were previously unreachable by Quranic education.

Substantively, this program contributes at three levels. At the micro level, it provides access to Quranic education for the most marginalized individuals. At the meso level, it builds a multi-stakeholder collaboration model that can serve as a reference for other institutions. At the macro level, it promotes a shift in discourse on inclusive da'wah and the right to religious education for persons with disabilities in the Indonesian Islamic context.

The novelty of this model lies in the organic integration of the pesantren tradition, academic spirit of higher education, community solidarity, and productive zakat instruments as the basis for program sustainability. This model proves that pesantren values—especially the values of service, sincerity, and care for the weak—can be actualized systemically in the form of a structured, inclusive education program.

Recommendations arising from this program are: (1) the need to replicate the pesantren-based Inclusive TPQ model in other regencies that have SLBs and Islamic campuses; (2) the need to formalize inclusive TPQ curricula by the Ministry of Religious Affairs as a national guideline; (3) the need for systematic training for conventional TPQ teachers on the basics of inclusive pedagogy; (4) the need for national and regional BAZNAS involvement in funding similar programs as a form of productive zakat for empowering persons with disabilities.

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