

Visual Media in Islamic Religious Education for Deaf Learners: A Special School Study

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ABSTRACT

Islamic religious education for deaf learners faces a problem that is seldom stated explicitly: religious content is dense with abstract concepts, while the principal channel through which it is delivered in class is oral. This study describes the visual media used by Islamic education teachers at SLB Negeri Kebayakan, explains how these media function in the learning process, and identifies the constraints on their use. A descriptive qualitative approach was adopted. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the Islamic education teacher as key informant, with the principal and teaching assistants as supporting informants, through classroom observation, and through analysis of teaching modules and archived instructional media, and were analyzed using an interactive model. The findings show that visual media at this school do not substitute for oral explanation but scaffold sign language: images and videos supply a shared referent that gives the teacher's signing something concrete to point to. Visual media proved effective for movement-based material such as ablution and prayer, but limited for doctrinal concepts with no visual counterpart. The principal constraint was not the absence of equipment but the absence of a settled sign vocabulary for religious terminology. The study concludes that strengthening inclusive Islamic education requires investment in religious sign vocabulary rather than in technology alone.

Keywords: Visual Media, Islamic Religious Education, Deaf Learners, Sign Language, Inclusive Education

ABSTRAK

Pendidikan Agama Islam bagi siswa tunarungu menghadapi persoalan yang jarang dirumuskan secara eksplisit: materi keagamaan sarat konsep abstrak, sementara jalur utama penyampaian di kelas bersifat lisan. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan jenis media visual yang digunakan guru PAI di SLB Negeri Kebayakan, menjelaskan cara media tersebut bekerja dalam pembelajaran, serta mengidentifikasi kendala penerapannya. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan guru PAI sebagai informan kunci, kepala sekolah dan guru pendamping sebagai informan penunjang, observasi kelas, serta telaah dokumen berupa modul ajar dan arsip media pembelajaran, lalu dianalisis dengan model interaktif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media visual di sekolah ini tidak berfungsi sebagai pengganti penjelasan lisan, melainkan sebagai penyangga bagi bahasa isyarat: gambar dan video menyediakan rujukan bersama yang membuat isyarat guru memiliki acuan konkret. Media visual terbukti efektif untuk materi bertumpu gerak seperti wudu dan salat, tetapi terbatas untuk konsep akidah yang tidak memiliki padanan visual. Kendala utama bukan ketiadaan perangkat, melainkan ketiadaan kosakata isyarat baku untuk istilah keagamaan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penguatan pembelajaran PAI inklusif perlu diarahkan pada pengembangan kosakata isyarat keagamaan, bukan semata pada pengadaan teknologi.

Kata Kunci: Media Visual, Pendidikan Agama Islam, Siswa Tunarungu, Bahasa Isyarat, Pendidikan Inklusif

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I. INTRODUCTION

SLB Negeri Kebayakan is a special education institution located on Jln. Abd Wahab Kebayakan, Dusun Gunung Balohen, Kebayakan District, Central Aceh Regency, Aceh Province, Indonesia. The school was established in response to the increasing need for educational services for children with special needs in the Central Aceh region. Since its establishment in 2008, with support from the local community and the Central Aceh Education Office, SLB Negeri Kebayakan Takengon has provided educational services for children with various disabilities, including visual impairment, hearing impairment, and intellectual disabilities.

One of the greatest challenges in educating students with hearing impairments lies in their limited ability to comprehend verbal information. Communication barriers make it difficult for deaf students to fully grasp spoken messages, which consequently reduces the effectiveness of learning processes that rely heavily on oral explanation. This challenge is particularly evident in the subject of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), which often involves abstract concepts such as faith, worship rituals, and moral values.

To address these challenges, teachers have employed visual media as an instructional tool. These include images, videos, animations, posters, picture cards, and even live simulations. Through visual media, learning content can be presented in a concrete, engaging, and easily understandable manner. For example, when teaching wudu (ablution) or salat (prayer), deaf students are able to follow the steps more effectively by imitating movements displayed through videos or illustrations. Visualization thus becomes a crucial bridge for students who rely on visual perception as their primary learning channel. Observations at the school revealed that PAI teachers play a vital role in guiding and introducing Islamic teachings to students with special needs, particularly those with hearing impairments. Teachers utilize visual media such as images and movement animations to explain religious practices, including salat, wudu, and stories of the prophets. These materials are often projected through simple tools such as an infocus projector. The students exhibit enthusiasm and positive responses, although their levels of achievement vary according to individual abilities. The role of PAI teachers is therefore pivotal, as they must translate Islamic values into methods that are comprehensible, practical, and adapted to the unique characteristics of each learner.

Interviews with PAI teachers at SLB Negeri Kebayakan indicate that deaf students possess diverse levels of hearing loss. While some experience profound deafness, many fall into the hard of hearing category, meaning they can still perceive certain sounds with the help of hearing aids or amplified volume. Despite auditory limitations, the visual modality remains the most influential channel for learning. Visual components such as images, gestures, symbols, and body language help convey information more comprehensively to deaf learners.

Visual media including pictures, animations, and videos assist students in understanding abstract religious materials by making them more tangible. For instance, when teaching the steps of wudu or salat, teachers display instructional videos or sequential images and reinforce them using sign language explanations. This practice aligns with Mayer's (2009) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which posits that learning becomes more effective when information is presented through both pictorial and textual modes.

Furthermore, Tomlinson's (2001) Differentiated Instruction Theory highlights the importance of adapting learning processes to accommodate the characteristics and needs of individual learners. At

SLB Negeri Kebayakan, teachers apply this approach by designing visually based and hands-on learning activities tailored to the learning styles of deaf students.

Religious instruction for deaf learners emphasizes practice and habituation, where visual media play a significant role in clarifying abstract content that cannot be easily explained through text or sign language alone. Students appear more focused and enthusiastic when lessons are presented visually. When teachers show videos of worship practices, students can directly imitate the movements while teachers explain the spiritual meanings behind them through sign language. This condition illustrates the necessity of adopting pedagogical approaches that are not only adaptive but also innovative and inclusive. Visual media serve not to improve hearing ability but to enhance comprehension, as they provide concrete, engaging, and visually compatible learning experiences aligned with the dominant visual learning style of deaf students.

However, research focusing specifically on the use of visual media in Islamic Religious Education for deaf students particularly in rural or peripheral areas such as SLB Negeri Kebayakan remains limited. Previous studies have largely concentrated on general subjects or quantitative perspectives, leaving a gap in understanding teachers' lived experiences in implementing visually based religious instruction.

Considering these conditions, the present study becomes essential. Beyond contributing to the development of instructional media tailored to the characteristics of deaf learners, this research seeks to capture the authentic experiences of teachers in implementing inclusive Islamic education in special schools. Therefore, a phenomenological qualitative approach was employed to explore teachers' perceptions, experiences, and meanings regarding the use of visual media in Islamic Religious Education at SLB Negeri Kebayakan. Based on this background, the study is entitled "The Use of Visual Media in Teaching Islamic Religious Education for Deaf Students at SLB Negeri Kebayakan."

II. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. The choice follows from the research questions, which seek an account of practices as they occur in a particular setting and of the reasoning behind them, rather than a measurement of effect. A descriptive design permits the findings to be reported as contextual narrative, which is appropriate where the phenomenon of interest is the relationship between two instructional modalities rather than the magnitude of an outcome.

The research was conducted at SLB Negeri Kebayakan on Jalan Abdul Wahab, Dusun Gunung Balohen, Kebayakan District, Central Aceh Regency, Aceh. The site was selected purposively because it is the principal provider of special education in the district, because Islamic education there is taught with visual media as a matter of routine rather than experiment, and because its resource conditions are representative of regional special schools.

Data were drawn from three sources. The key informant was the Islamic education teacher who instructs the school's deaf and hard-of-hearing students and who designs or selects the media used. Supporting informants comprised the school principal, teaching assistants present during Islamic education sessions, and deaf students participating in those sessions, whose responses were captured through observation and through the teacher's mediation rather than through direct interview. Documents examined included teaching modules, the teacher's preparation notes, photographic records of learning activities, and the instructional media themselves.

Three techniques generated the data. In-depth interviews with the key informant explored the rationale for media selection, the sequence in which media and signing were deployed, the material for which media were judged suitable or unsuitable, and the difficulties encountered. Direct observation of

Islamic education sessions recorded what media were used, how the teacher positioned herself relative to the projection, how students distributed their attention, and what happened at moments when comprehension visibly faltered. Documentation review served to corroborate interview accounts and to establish whether media use was planned or improvised.

Analysis followed the interactive model, comprising three concurrent activities. Data condensation reduced interview transcripts, field notes, and document extracts to coded segments organised around media type, instructional function, and constraint. Data display arranged these segments so that patterns across sources became visible, in particular the recurring sequence in which media and signing alternated. Conclusion drawing and verification developed provisional interpretations and tested them against the remaining data and against the accounts of participants. Coding within this process followed reflexive principles, with categories generated inductively from participants' accounts rather than imposed in advance (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Trustworthiness was addressed through triangulation across interview, observation, and document sources; through prolonged engagement in the setting, which allowed routine rather than performed practice to be observed; through member checking of the researcher's interpretations with the key informant; and through thick description of the setting to support the reader's judgement of transferability. Ethical procedures included permission from the school leadership, informed consent from adult participants, parental consent for the involvement of students, the removal of identifying details, and the use of photographic material solely for research documentation.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Repertoire and Its Distribution Across Content

The visual media in use at SLB Negeri Kebayakan comprise four types: sequential illustrated guides for ablution and prayer, instructional videos demonstrating the same procedures, animated narratives of the prophets, and still images used to introduce vocabulary. These are projected using a single in focus unit, supplemented by printed cards when the projector is unavailable, a substitution also reported in other special schools operating under comparable constraints (Oktaviani et al., 2024). The repertoire is modest and, on the evidence of the teaching modules, deliberately so; the teacher reported selecting a small number of media she could deploy reliably rather than a larger set she could not.

What is analytically significant is the uneven distribution of this repertoire across content. Media use clusters heavily on procedural material. Ablution, prayer movements, and the sequence of daily supplication are supported by illustration and video in nearly every recorded session. Narrative material, chiefly the lives of the prophets, is supported by animation. Doctrinal material, including the attributes of God and the concept of sincerity in worship, is supported by almost nothing; when it arises, the teacher relies on signing, on written Indonesian, and on analogy to situations the students have experienced.

This distribution is not an oversight but a recognition of fit. Procedural content is intrinsically visible: an ablution sequence can be shown because ablution is a sequence of visible acts, and a video of it is not a representation of the concept but an instance of it. Narrative content is visualizable at one remove, since events can be depicted even where their significance cannot. Doctrinal content is neither. The finding qualifies a common formulation in the literature, which holds that visual media make abstract religious material concrete. In this setting they did not do so. What they made concrete was material that was already concrete in principle but inaccessible in practice because it had been delivered orally. The abstract material remained abstract.

This qualification has a direct consequence for how such programs should be evaluated. Reports of effectiveness drawn from ablution and prayer lessons cannot be extended to Islamic education as a whole, because they sample the portion of the curriculum where the fit between medium and material is most

favorable. An honest account of visual media in Islamic education for deaf learners must specify which part of the curriculum it describes.

Media as Referent for Signing

The second finding concerns how the media function, and here the observation data are more informative than the interview data. The teacher described her practice as showing a video and then explaining it in sign language. Observation revealed a finer-grained and more revealing pattern. The video was rarely played through and then discussed. Instead, it was paused repeatedly, at each pause the teacher signed while indicating the frozen image, students looked between the image and the teacher, and the video advanced only when their attention returned to the screen, a pattern of imitation-after-viewing also observed in studies of interactive video with learners who depend on visual input (Mayasari & Halimah, 2024). Signing and image were not sequential but interleaved.

The significance of this pattern lies in what it reveals about the function of the image. It was not serving as an alternative explanation that students could interpret independently; if it had been, pausing would have been unnecessary. It was serving as a referent, a shared object that the teacher could indicate while signing so that her signs had something determinate to attach to. The frozen frame supplied the noun; the signing supplied the predicate. Neither was intelligible alone.

This reading is consistent with the multimedia account set out earlier, but it also refines it. The standard formulation, that learning improves when information arrives through two channels, does not apply straightforwardly here, because for these students both the image and the signing arrive through the same channel. The visual channel must carry the entire instructional load, and the risk is therefore competition rather than complementarity: an image and a signing teacher compete for the same visual attention. What the observed pausing accomplishes is the management of that competition. By alternating rather than superimposing, the teacher ensures that the two visual streams are attended to in turn rather than simultaneously. The pedagogical skill on display is not media selection but attentional sequencing.

This finding bears directly on the question posed in the introduction. Visual media in this setting do not replace explanation; they make signed explanation possible by giving it a referent. It follows that the quality of instruction is bounded by the quality of the signing, not by the quality of the media. A better video accompanied by imprecise signing yields imprecise understanding, because the video establishes what is being talked about while the signing establishes what is being said about it.

The Constraint Is Vocabulary, Not Equipment

The third finding follows from the second and reverses the usual ordering of constraints. Both the teacher and the supporting informants identified difficulties of three kinds: equipment, teacher capacity to produce media, and sign-language proficiency. The first two are consistently emphasized in the literature. The third proved, on examination, to be the binding one.

Equipment constraints are real but manageable. A single projector shared across the school means that Islamic education sessions occasionally proceed without it, and the teacher's response is to substitute printed cards, which observation showed to be less engaging but functionally adequate for procedural material. The constraint reduces the quality of instruction without preventing it. Capacity constraints are similar in character: the teacher reported limited skill in producing her own visual content and relied largely on materials sourced elsewhere, with the result that some material was less well matched to her students than she would have wished.

The vocabulary constraint is of a different order. The teacher reported, and observation confirmed, that for a substantial part of religious terminology there is no settled sign. Terms such as sincerity, intention, and the divine attributes are handled by improvisation, a difficulty likewise recorded in work on signed Qur'anic instruction (Oktavia et al., 2023; Zaenuri & Maemonah, 2022): fingerspelling the Indonesian word, coining a descriptive sign, or resorting to an approximation. Improvised signs are not shared across

teachers and are not carried between school years, so a student may encounter a different sign for the same concept in successive years, and the teacher cannot verify that the sign she has coined is understood as she intends.

This is the point at which the mechanism identified in the second finding becomes consequential. If media function as referents for signing, then instruction fails wherever signing fails, regardless of how good the media are. And signing fails precisely where the curriculum is most doctrinal, which is also where media support is thinnest. The two weaknesses coincide rather than compensate. A student can learn the sequence of ablution because the video shows it and the signing need only direct attention to what is shown; the student cannot as readily learn what sincerity in ablution means, because neither the video nor the available sign vocabulary can carry it.

This diagnosis reorders the practical priorities that studies in this area usually propose. The standard recommendations are equipment provision, teacher training in media production, and curriculum guidelines for inclusive religious education (Triana, 2024; Una et al., 2023; Salsabila et al., 2022). The present analysis suggests these are correctly identified but wrongly ranked. Equipment provision improves an already functional process at the margin. Media production training addresses a constraint that better sourcing could partly relieve. Neither touches the vocabulary problem, which no amount of equipment or media skill will resolve because it is a problem of language rather than of instruction. What is required is the development, standardization, and dissemination of a religious sign vocabulary, an undertaking that exceeds the capacity of a single school and properly belongs to religious education authorities working with the deaf community.

Two qualifications should be recorded. First, the claim that vocabulary is the binding constraint is an interpretation of the pattern in the data rather than a demonstration; establishing it would require comparing settings that differ in sign-vocabulary provision while holding equipment constant. Second, the analysis concerns Islamic education specifically and may not extend to subjects whose content is less abstract, where the fit between media and material is more uniform.

Read together, the three findings describe a practice that is more sophisticated than its own account of itself. The teacher describes using media to explain religious material to deaf students. What she does is use media to create referents that make her signing intelligible, distributing that technique across the portion of the curriculum where referents are available, and improvising where they are not. The improvisation is the pressure point, and it is where support should be directed. Framing the problem as one of inclusive access to technology, as much policy discourse does, misidentifies both the difficulty and its remedy: the students in this school are not excluded from Islamic education because they lack a projector, but because the language in which it would have to be taught to them has not yet been fully built.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of visual media in Islamic religious education for deaf learners at SLB Negeri Kebayakan and reached three conclusions. First, the media repertoire is concentrated on procedural material such as ablution and prayer, where visual representation and content correspond naturally, and is thin on doctrinal material, which has no visual counterpart; visual media therefore render accessible material that was already concrete, rather than making abstract material concrete. Second, visual media function as referents for signed explanation rather than as independent carriers of meaning, as evidenced by the teacher's practice of interleaving pauses with signing so that the two visual streams are attended to in sequence rather than in competition. Third, and consequently, the binding constraint on instruction is the absence of a settled sign vocabulary for religious terminology, not the shortage of equipment or the teacher's media-production skills.

The study's contribution is to reorder the priorities that the literature on inclusive Islamic education has established. If visual media derive their instructional value from the signing they support, then

investment in media without corresponding investment in the language of instruction addresses the more tractable problem rather than the more consequential one.

Three implications follow. Religious education authorities, in cooperation with deaf-community organizations, should undertake the development and standardization of a religious sign vocabulary, since this exceeds what any single school can accomplish and its absence is felt in every school. Teacher professional development for special schools should treat sign-language proficiency in religious terminology as a substantive component rather than assume general signing competence suffices. And schools should record and share the signs their teachers improvise, so that the coinages of one year are not lost to the next.

The study is limited to a single school with a small number of informants over a bounded period, and its central claim about the primacy of the vocabulary constraint is an interpretation grounded in one setting. Comparative work across special schools differing in sign-vocabulary provision would test that claim, and a study of how deaf students themselves understand religious concepts, rather than how teachers convey them, would address a perspective this study could reach only indirectly.

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