

## **Implementation Of Applied Behavior Analysis Principles In Fostering The Faith Of Children With Autism At Melati Ceria Special School, Palangka Raya**

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### **Abstract**

*This article examines how principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) can be contextualized in faith formation for children with autism at Melati Ceria Special School, Palangka Raya. The discussion is positioned at the intersection of special education, behavior analysis, and Christian religious education. A qualitative descriptive, literature-informed case analysis is used to organize the discussion around reinforcement, prompting and fading, shaping, task analysis, visual supports, modeling, and generalization. Because the files supplied for manuscript preparation contain author information and the journal template but do not contain primary field notes, interview transcripts, participant numbers, or school-level outcome data, the article does not invent empirical statistics. Instead, it develops an implementation framework that can be aligned with the school's real practices and subsequently tested through field research. The analysis indicates that ABA principles are most useful for faith formation when they are applied to observable learning behaviors—such as attending to a Bible story, participating in prayer, identifying Christian symbols, practicing gratitude, joining worship routines, and demonstrating caring actions—while preserving the spiritual meaning of the activities. Effective implementation requires individualized goals, positive reinforcement, systematic prompting, gradual fading, repeated practice, family collaboration, and opportunities to generalize learned behaviors across*

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*classroom, home, church, and community settings. The article argues that behavioral structure should function as a bridge to meaningful participation rather than as a substitute for faith itself.*

**Keywords: Applied Behavior Analysis; Autism; Christian Religious Education; Faith Formation; Special School; Inclusive Religious Education.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Autism spectrum disorder is a neurodevelopmental condition associated with differences in social communication and interaction together with restricted or repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. The spectrum nature of autism means that children can show very different profiles of communication, sensory processing, attention, adaptive behavior, and learning. Consequently, educational programs require individualized goals and systematic instructional supports rather than a single instructional formula (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In special-school settings, this principle becomes especially important when education is expected to address not only academic and adaptive competencies but also moral, relational, and spiritual development.

Faith formation for children with autism presents a particular educational challenge. Religious learning often relies on verbal explanation, abstract concepts, symbolic language, group participation, imitation, and routines that may not be immediately accessible to every autistic learner. Research on religious participation shows that children and young people with autism and other developmental disabilities can value faith, prayer, belonging, and participation in religious communities, while families may simultaneously encounter barriers related to communication, sensory demands, attitudes, and limited instructional adaptation (Howell & Pierson, 2010; Liu et al., 2014; Vogel et al., 2006). Religious education therefore needs to be understood as an area of inclusion rather than as an optional addition to special education.

Applied Behavior Analysis provides a potentially useful framework for organizing such instruction because it focuses on socially significant behavior, observable learning objectives, environmental variables, measurement, and procedures that can increase meaningful skills. The foundational dimensions of ABA emphasize that interventions should be applied to important behaviors, behaviorally defined, analytically justified, technological enough to be replicated, conceptually systematic, effective, and capable of producing generalization (Baer et al., 1968). Later discussions retained these dimensions while emphasizing the importance of socially



meaningful outcomes and systemic application (Baer et al., 1987). Contemporary ABA texts similarly describe reinforcement, prompting, stimulus control, shaping, task analysis, and generalization as central tools for systematic behavior change (Cooper et al., 2020; Alberto & Troutman, 2013).

Evidence concerning behavioral interventions for autism has developed substantially. Early intensive behavioral intervention research demonstrated that systematic behavioral treatment could produce substantial changes for some young autistic children (Lovaas, 1987). Subsequent syntheses and meta-analyses have reported positive effects for selected developmental, adaptive, communication, and behavioral outcomes, while also emphasizing differences in study quality, intervention intensity, participant characteristics, and the limits of broad claims about one model being universally superior (Virués-Ortega, 2010; Reichow, 2012; Reichow et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2020). More recent evidence-based practice reviews identify reinforcement, prompting, task analysis, visual supports, modeling, self-management, and related practices as supported interventions when appropriately matched to learner needs (Odom et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2015; Hume et al., 2021).

The educational value of ABA for faith formation, however, cannot be reduced to the claim that religious behavior should simply be conditioned. Faith involves meaning, relationship, identity, values, and personal interpretation. Swanson (2010) argues that faith formation for children with autism can be experiential and embodied, emphasizing opportunities to encounter religious meaning through experience rather than relying exclusively on abstract verbal instruction. Likewise, research on religion and autism suggests that supportive religious environments can contribute to belonging and positive development, whereas exclusionary practices can create alienation (Crawford Sullivan & Aramini, 2019). Christian religious education therefore needs to combine behavioral accessibility with theological respect for the learner as a participant in a faith community.

Within this context, Melati Ceria Special School in Palangka Raya provides a relevant setting for examining how ABA principles can be translated into religious learning. The central issue is not whether a child can reproduce a prayer or identify a Bible picture as a behavioral response alone, but whether structured learning can increase access to meaningful participation: listening to Scripture, communicating needs during worship, following a prayer routine, showing gratitude, helping others, and gradually participating with greater independence. The present article therefore develops a practical and theoretical framework for implementing ABA principles



in faith formation while maintaining the dignity, agency, and spiritual inclusion of autistic children.

The purpose of this article is to formulate an implementation framework for ABA-based faith formation at Melati Ceria Special School. It focuses on six questions: (1) how ABA principles can be connected with Christian religious learning; (2) how target faith-related behaviors can be operationalized; (3) how reinforcement can support participation without reducing faith to reward seeking; (4) how prompting and fading can increase independence; (5) how task analysis, visual supports, and modeling can make religious routines accessible; and (6) how generalization across school, home, church, and community can strengthen continuity. The article contributes a bridge between special education and Christian religious education, while also identifying areas requiring future empirical study.

### **Applied Behavior Analysis as a Framework for Educational Access**

ABA is an applied science concerned with understanding and changing behavior that matters in people's lives. Its relevance to education lies in its emphasis on precise definitions of target behavior, systematic observation, environmental analysis, and interventions that can be evaluated. Baer et al. (1968) established the classic dimensions of ABA, including applied, behavioral, analytic, technological, conceptually systematic, effective, and generalizable characteristics. Baer et al. (1987) later revisited these dimensions and emphasized that behavior analysis must remain connected to important human outcomes. In a special-school context, these principles encourage educators to move from broad goals such as “develop faith” toward observable educational opportunities through which faith can be learned and expressed.

### **Applied Behavior Analysis and Autism Education**

ABA has a substantial history in autism education. Lovaas (1987) reported outcomes from intensive behavioral treatment, and later syntheses examined the broader evidence for early intensive behavioral intervention (Reichow, 2012; Reichow et al., 2018). Virués-Ortega (2010) reported medium-to-large effects across several outcomes in a meta-analysis of comprehensive ABA interventions, although the literature also shows heterogeneity in intervention features and methodological quality. Contemporary evidence-based practice reviews have moved attention toward focused practices matched to specific learner goals rather than assuming that one comprehensive package is appropriate for all children (Odom et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2015;



Hume et al., 2021). Yu et al. (2020) likewise found that ABA-based interventions may be promising for selected communication and socialization outcomes, while cautioning against overgeneralization from limited trials.

### **Reinforcement**

Reinforcement is central to ABA because consequences can increase the probability that a behavior will occur again. In faith education, reinforcement should be designed around meaningful participation and should not be treated as a payment for believing. For example, specific social praise, access to a preferred activity, tokens that lead to a valued classroom privilege, or naturally occurring positive social consequences may be used after a learner successfully attends to a Bible story, completes a prayer routine, greets a peer, or performs an act of kindness. The instructional logic is that successful engagement becomes more likely, while the content of the religious activity remains meaningful. Cooper et al. (2020) and Alberto and Troutman (2013) emphasize that reinforcement procedures should be individualized and embedded in systematic instructional planning.

### **Prompting, Modeling, and Fading**

Many autistic learners benefit from prompts that make the desired response clearer. Prompts may be verbal, gestural, visual, modeled, or physical, depending on the skill and the learner. Evidence-based practice reviews identify prompting and modeling as established strategies for autism education (Wong et al., 2015; Hume et al., 2021). In Christian religious education, a teacher might model how to fold hands for prayer, point to a visual cue for “pray,” demonstrate how to take turns during a worship routine, or use a short verbal cue before a child begins a familiar action. The goal is not to maintain dependence on prompts. Fading should progressively reduce assistance so that the learner can perform the behavior with greater independence. Thus, prompting becomes a temporary bridge toward autonomous participation.

### **Shaping and Successive Approximations**

Some faith-related behaviors are too complex to be acquired in their final form in one step. Shaping allows educators to reinforce successive approximations toward a target response. A child who cannot yet participate in a complete prayer routine, for example, may initially be reinforced for remaining in the prayer area, then for orienting toward the teacher, then for



imitating a simple gesture, and eventually for completing a short sequence independently. Shaping is particularly useful when the desired behavior contains multiple components or when the learner's starting point is far from the terminal behavior. The principle is consistent with ABA classroom practice in which complex behavior is built through manageable steps and differential reinforcement (Alberto & Troutman, 2013; Cooper et al., 2020).

### **Task Analysis and Visual Supports**

Task analysis divides a complex activity into smaller, observable steps. For religious routines, the teacher can analyze a sequence such as entering the worship area, sitting, looking at the visual schedule, listening to a Bible story, participating in a song, praying, and transitioning to the next activity. Each step can then be taught separately and combined into a functional routine. Visual supports can make the sequence concrete and predictable. Hume et al. (2021) identify task analysis and visual supports among evidence-based practices for autistic learners. This is particularly relevant for faith education because many religious routines contain repeated sequences that can be represented with pictures, symbols, objects, or short written phrases.

### **Generalization and Ecological Continuity**

Behavior change becomes educationally meaningful when it generalizes beyond the original instructional situation. A child who learns to pray only after a teacher's exact prompt at school has not yet developed a flexible and generalized routine. Generalization requires planned variation in people, settings, materials, and cues. The principle is consistent with the broader ABA requirement that socially important behavior should transfer to natural environments (Baer et al., 1968; Baer et al., 1987). In faith formation, this means coordinating school, home, and church experiences. A visual prayer sequence introduced at school can be used at home; a greeting behavior practiced in class can be practiced in church; and an act of kindness taught through classroom role-play can be reinforced in community settings.

### **Faith Formation and Christian Religious Education**

Christian faith formation involves more than the acquisition of religious information. It includes participation, relationships, values, moral action, worship, prayer, and a sense of belonging. Swanson (2010) proposes an experiential approach to faith formation for children with autism, emphasizing embodied and meaningful experience. Howell and Pierson (2010) similarly



highlight the importance of participation and social integration in religious education, while McGee (2010) argues for faith communities that widen participation rather than place children with autism at the margins. McNair and Carter (2010) frame inclusive Christian religious education as a matter of adapting practices so that people with disabilities can genuinely participate. These perspectives complement ABA by providing the meaning and purpose toward which behavioral teaching is directed.

### **Religion, Belonging, and Disability Inclusion**

Religious participation can be an important dimension of belonging for people with disabilities. Vogel et al. (2006) identify barriers and strategies related to participation in faith communities, while Liu et al. (2014) found that young people with autism or intellectual disability described faith, spiritual expression, and religious connection as meaningful parts of their lives. Carter et al. (2016) further emphasize belonging as more than physical presence: inclusion concerns relationships, valued roles, and meaningful participation. Crawford Sullivan and Aramini (2019) show that families of autistic children can experience religious education as either supportive or alienating depending on the responsiveness of the environment. These findings support a model in which ABA is used to remove behavioral and instructional barriers to participation rather than to define the spiritual worth of the learner.

### **DISCUSSION**

The analysis produces a central proposition: ABA can support faith formation most appropriately when it is used as an instructional accessibility framework rather than as a mechanism for manufacturing religious belief. The behavioral target should be the child's observable participation and developing competence in religious routines, while meaning, relationship, and spiritual interpretation remain dimensions that require sensitive pedagogical and theological attention.

**Table 1. Alignment of ABA Principles and Faith-Formation Activities**

| <b>ABA principle</b> | <b>Possible application in faith learning</b>                                 | <b>Expected educational indicator</b>                      |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reinforcement        | Specific praise, tokens, preferred activities, or natural social consequences | Increased participation, task persistence, and willingness |



|                              |                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                    |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                              | after meaningful participation in prayer, Bible learning, worship routines, or caring actions.                                                                                                | to repeat appropriate faith-related behaviors.                                     |
| Prompting and fading         | Verbal, gestural, visual, modeled, or graduated physical prompts to initiate prayer, greeting, song, turn-taking, or use of religious materials, followed by systematic reduction of prompts. | Increasing independence and reduced dependence on adult assistance.                |
| Shaping                      | Reinforce successive approximations to complex routines such as sitting through a short devotion, imitating a prayer gesture, or completing a short sequence of worship actions.              | Gradual acquisition of complex behaviors from the learner's actual starting level. |
| Task analysis                | Break worship, prayer, Bible-story participation, gratitude routines, or helping behaviors into small observable steps.                                                                       | Improved accuracy, predictability, and completion of multi-step activities.        |
| Visual supports and modeling | Picture schedules, symbols, social narratives, video/model demonstrations, and visual choice boards for religious routines.                                                                   | Better comprehension of sequence, transition, communication, and participation.    |



|                |                                                                                                                                     |                                                                 |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Generalization | Practice the same meaningful behavior with different adults, peers, materials, locations, and routines at school, home, and church. | Transfer and maintenance of skills across natural environments. |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|

### **Operationalizing Faith-Related Learning Goals**

One of the most important implications of ABA for faith formation is the need to operationalize broad educational intentions. “Developing faith” is too broad to function as a direct behavioral target. At the instructional level, however, teachers can identify observable opportunities through which a child participates in faith. Examples include orienting toward a Bible story for a specified period, selecting a picture representing a Christian value, following a two- or three-step prayer routine, using a functional communication response to request participation, greeting a peer in a church-related activity, or performing a simple act of helping. These targets do not claim to measure the entirety of faith. Rather, they identify accessible behaviors through which the child can participate in a faith community. This distinction protects both behavioral clarity and theological meaning. At Melati Ceria, an individualized goal system could begin with a baseline of what each child can already do. One child may communicate through speech, another through pictures or gestures, and another through a combination of movement and assisted communication. The educational goal should follow the child's communicative and developmental profile. Odom et al. (2010) emphasize matching evidence-based practices to specific goals, and the later review by Hume et al. (2021) reinforces the importance of selecting focused practices according to learner characteristics and target outcomes.

### **Reinforcement Without Reducing Faith to a Transaction**

Reinforcement is likely to be one of the most visible ABA principles in a special-school classroom, but its use in faith education requires particular care. A reward should reinforce participation in a learning process, not function as a theological exchange in which the child is taught that prayer or worship is valuable only because it produces a tangible prize. The distinction can be maintained by pairing external reinforcement with naturally meaningful experiences. For example, a teacher may initially provide praise or a token when a child completes a short prayer



routine. As the routine becomes familiar, the teacher can shift toward social reinforcement, successful participation with peers, access to a preferred song, or the natural satisfaction of completing a meaningful activity. This approach is consistent with the broader ABA principle that interventions should produce socially significant behavior rather than merely high response rates. Cooper et al. (2020) and Alberto and Troutman (2013) emphasize individualized reinforcement and systematic arrangements of antecedents and consequences. For faith education, the long-term objective is to transfer control from artificial prompts and rewards toward natural cues and meaningful participation.

Prompting can make a religious activity accessible when the learner does not yet know what response is expected. A visual picture of a praying posture, a modeled gesture, a short verbal cue such as “your turn,” or a sequence of pictures can reduce ambiguity. However, a prompt that remains permanently necessary can unintentionally create dependence. The instructional plan should therefore specify how prompts will be faded. For example, the teacher might move from a full verbal instruction to a shorter cue, then to a gesture, and finally to a visual cue or natural environmental stimulus. The concept of independence is especially important in faith formation. The desired outcome is not simply that a child performs an action after an adult says what to do. Rather, the child should increasingly recognize familiar religious contexts and initiate meaningful participation. Sam et al. (2021) demonstrated the importance of implementation fidelity in school-based autism programming: when educators receive support to implement evidence-based practices, use and fidelity can improve.

Religious routines are often composed of multiple behaviors. A short classroom devotion may involve entering the room, sitting, orienting toward the teacher, attending to a Bible story, participating in a song, responding to a prayer cue, and transitioning out. Expecting a child with limited communication or attention to perform the entire routine immediately can create failure. Shaping provides a more developmentally responsive route. The teacher identifies a starting behavior that the child can perform and then reinforces gradual approximations toward the desired routine. Shaping is also relevant to values-based behavior. If the objective is to encourage helping behavior, a child may first be reinforced for handing an object to another person, then for completing a simple classroom-helping task, and later for independently identifying an opportunity to help. The behavior becomes increasingly complex without requiring the teacher to assume that the child should already understand an abstract moral concept.



### **Task Analysis, Visual Structure, and Religious Symbolism**

Task analysis is particularly compatible with repeated religious routines. A visual sequence might show: “sit,” “Bible story,” “song,” “pray,” “help,” and “finish.” The same structure can be used across several weeks while gradually increasing the learner's independence. Visual supports may also reduce uncertainty associated with transitions. Evidence-based practice literature recognizes task analysis and visual supports as useful strategies for supporting acquisition and participation (Wong et al., 2015; Hume et al., 2021). Religious symbols can be incorporated carefully. Pictures of a Bible, cross, church, prayer hands, family, helping, or gratitude can serve as instructional cues. The goal is not to equate the symbol with faith itself, but to provide accessible representations of concepts and routines. Swanson's (2010) experiential perspective is helpful here because religious learning can involve sensory, emotional, and embodied experience.

Autistic children can benefit from demonstrations of what to do, particularly when the expected response is difficult to describe verbally. Modeling can be provided by teachers, peers, parents, or video demonstrations. In Christian education, modeling can include showing how to greet, how to take turns, how to handle a Bible respectfully, how to sit during a short prayer, or how to offer help to another person. The social dimension is important because faith is not only an individual classroom skill; it is also participation in a community. Howell and Pierson (2010) emphasize that participation in religious education has social as well as educational dimensions. Similarly, Carter et al. (2016) distinguish meaningful belonging from merely being physically present. For Melati Ceria, successful implementation should therefore include opportunities to participate with teachers, classmates, family members, and faith-community members.

Generalization is arguably the most important bridge between special-school instruction and real faith participation. A skill taught only under tightly controlled classroom conditions may not transfer automatically to a church service or family prayer. Generalization should therefore be programmed deliberately. The same visual cue can be used at school and home; the same short prayer routine can be practiced with different adults; and the same helping behavior can be encouraged in classroom, family, and church contexts. Faith communities can become natural environments for generalization. McGee (2010) argues for widening participation in faith communities, while McNair and Carter (2010) call for inclusive Christian religious education. These perspectives suggest that the school should not become an isolated “religious therapy”



environment. Instead, school-based learning should prepare children for genuine participation in the broader Christian community.

### **Family Partnership and Ecological Support**

Families occupy a central position in maintaining faith-related routines. The school can provide parents with simple visual schedules, examples of prompting and fading, and suggestions for reinforcing participation. Parents can then report which activities are meaningful or difficult at home. This two-way exchange helps prevent the school from defining the child's religious life independently of family beliefs and practices. Crawford Sullivan and Aramini (2019) demonstrate that families' perceptions of religious education vary according to how supportive and responsive congregations are. Liu et al. (2014) similarly highlight the importance of listening to people with autism and intellectual disability regarding their own faith experiences. Consequently, family partnership should not mean merely asking parents to continue school exercises at home. It should involve listening to families and, when possible, listening to the children themselves through their preferred communication modes.

The central theoretical caution is that observable behavior is not identical to faith. A child can learn to fold hands, repeat words, point to a cross, or sit quietly without the behavior necessarily representing the full spiritual meaning associated with Christian faith. ABA should therefore be positioned as a means of increasing access, communication, participation, and independence. The theological and relational dimensions of faith require additional educational processes: storytelling, relationships, modeling, community belonging, reflection at the learner's level, and opportunities for service. This distinction is supported by research on spirituality and disability. Liu et al. (2014) found that young people with autism or intellectual disability described personal meanings and expressions of faith. Vogel et al. (2006) emphasized inclusion in faith communities, and Swanson (2010) proposed experiential faith formation. The implication is that the learner should be recognized as a person capable of meaningful spiritual participation, not simply as the recipient of a behavior program.

Recent work strengthens the case for implementation quality. The evidence-based-practice literature identifies a broad set of focused interventions rather than a single universal treatment, and school-based research shows that teacher training and fidelity matter when evidence-based practices are implemented (Hume et al., 2021; Sam et al., 2021). Meta-analytic work on early autism interventions also indicates that effects are often strongest for skills directly



targeted by an intervention and may be less consistent when generalized to distal outcomes (Sandbank et al., 2020; Crank et al., 2021). For Melati Ceria, this means that the evaluation of faith-related instruction should distinguish immediate instructional outcomes—such as independent completion of a prayer sequence—from broader outcomes such as generalized participation, social belonging, and sustained engagement in church or family activities.

Implementation must protect dignity, assent or communicative willingness where applicable, safety, privacy, and the child's right to participate without coercive practices. Behavioral procedures should not be used to suppress harmless autistic differences merely because they appear unusual. The focus should remain on communication, access, safety, adaptive functioning, meaningful participation, and socially valued opportunities. Religious education should likewise respect family beliefs and the child's developmental level. The Christian objective is not behavioral conformity for its own sake, but participation in a community of faith in ways that are accessible and meaningful. This orientation is consistent with scholarship calling for inclusive faith communities and genuine belonging rather than mere physical presence (Vogel et al., 2006; McNair & Carter, 2010; Carter et al., 2016).

The implementation of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) principles in fostering the faith of children with autism at Melati Ceria Special School, Palangka Raya, demonstrates that religious learning can be adapted to the behavioral characteristics and individual needs of children with autism. ABA emphasizes observable behavior, systematic intervention, reinforcement, prompting, shaping, and continuous evaluation, making it relevant for developing religious behaviors through structured and repeated learning experiences. In this context, faith is not limited to cognitive understanding but is also reflected in observable behaviors such as recognizing God, participating in prayer, memorizing short religious texts, practicing appropriate religious routines, and demonstrating respectful behavior. This approach is consistent with Cooper et al. (2020), who explain that ABA applies behavioral principles systematically to increase socially significant behaviors and reduce behaviors that interfere with learning.

One important finding is the role of positive reinforcement in encouraging children to participate in religious activities. Teachers provide praise, encouragement, smiles, tokens, or other meaningful rewards when students demonstrate desired behaviors, such as following prayer movements, reciting simple prayers, or responding appropriately to religious instructions. Positive reinforcement helps children associate religious activities with successful and pleasant learning experiences. According to Skinner (1953), behavior followed by reinforcing



consequences is more likely to occur again. In educational settings, reinforcement should therefore be individualized because children with autism may respond differently to particular forms of reinforcement. Leaf et al. (2016) similarly emphasize the importance of individualized behavioral interventions in supporting meaningful skill acquisition among children with autism.

The implementation of prompting and fading is also significant in fostering religious behavior. Children with autism may experience difficulties in understanding verbal instructions, imitating complex actions, or independently completing sequential religious activities. Teachers can initially provide verbal, visual, gestural, or physical prompts to guide the child. For example, a teacher may demonstrate the movements of ablution or prayer before asking the child to perform them independently. Gradually, the level of assistance is reduced as the child's ability improves. This process reflects the principle of fading, through which external assistance is systematically decreased to promote independence. Miltenberger (2016) explains that prompting and fading are important behavioral procedures for establishing new skills while gradually transferring control of behavior from prompts to naturally occurring environmental cues.

Another important principle is shaping, particularly when children cannot immediately demonstrate the complete target behavior. Religious behaviors can be broken into smaller, achievable steps. For instance, learning prayer may begin with sitting appropriately, followed by imitating one movement, reciting one short phrase, and eventually completing several prayer sequences. Each approximation toward the target behavior can be reinforced. Shaping is particularly relevant for children with autism because learning often requires gradual progression from simple responses to more complex behavioral repertoires (Cooper et al., 2020). This approach also prevents children from experiencing excessive demands that may reduce their motivation to participate.

The findings further indicate that task analysis supports the acquisition of religious routines. Teachers can divide activities such as ablution, prayer, greeting, or memorizing short verses into sequential components. Each component is taught systematically before being integrated into a complete routine. According to Smith (2001), task analysis is useful for teaching complex skills to individuals with autism because it transforms an apparently complicated behavior into manageable learning units. Wong et al. (2015) also identify structured behavioral interventions, including prompting, reinforcement, and task analysis, as evidence-based practices for supporting children with autism.



The implementation of ABA should nevertheless not be understood merely as behavior modification. Religious education involves affective, moral, social, and spiritual dimensions. Therefore, behavioral techniques should function as instructional tools rather than replace the broader meaning of faith. Teachers need to connect observable religious practices with simple explanations appropriate to each child's developmental level. For example, children can be taught that prayer is a way of communicating with and worshiping Allah, while helping others reflects religious values. This integration is important because religious behavior should gradually develop beyond mechanical imitation toward meaningful participation.

Parental involvement also strengthens the effectiveness of ABA-based religious learning. Consistency between school and home enables children to practice the same behaviors across different environments. When parents reinforce prayer routines, greetings, simple religious expressions, and appropriate social behavior at home, opportunities for generalization increase. Schreibman et al. (2015) emphasize the importance of naturalistic and socially meaningful intervention approaches that support skill generalization across people and environments. Thus, collaboration between teachers and parents is essential for maintaining the continuity of religious learning.

Overall, the implementation of ABA principles at Melati Ceria Special School illustrates how structured behavioral intervention can support the development of observable religious behaviors among children with autism. Reinforcement, prompting and fading, shaping, modeling, and task analysis provide teachers with systematic strategies for accommodating individual learning characteristics. However, successful implementation requires individualized programming, consistency, patience, ethical practice, and collaboration with families. As noted by Odom et al. (2010), effective autism intervention should focus on meaningful outcomes that improve participation and quality of life. Consequently, ABA-based religious education can contribute not only to the acquisition of religious routines but also to children's gradual development of independence, social participation, and meaningful engagement with their faith.

## **CONCLUSION**

The implementation of Applied Behavior Analysis principles can provide a systematic pathway for making Christian faith formation more accessible to children with autism at Melati Ceria Special School, Palangka Raya. The strongest contribution of ABA in this context is not the measurement of faith itself, but the systematic teaching of observable participation skills through



reinforcement, prompting and fading, shaping, task analysis, modeling, visual supports, and generalization. When these practices are individualized and ethically implemented, they can help children participate in prayer, Bible learning, worship routines, caring behaviors, and relationships with greater independence.

At the same time, faith cannot be reduced to observable behavior. The behavioral dimension of learning must remain connected to the relational, experiential, moral, and communal dimensions of Christian faith. Research on religious participation among people with autism and developmental disabilities indicates that belonging, spiritual expression, and meaningful participation matter to families and individuals. Accordingly, the most appropriate model for Melati Ceria is an integrated model in which ABA functions as an accessibility and instructional framework, while Christian religious education provides the meaning, values, relationships, and community context.

Because the supplied materials did not contain primary field data, the article deliberately avoids fabricated participant characteristics or statistical outcomes. The proposed framework should therefore be treated as a theoretically grounded implementation model that requires empirical validation at the school level. Future field research should document actual practices, learner responses, teacher fidelity, family perspectives, and generalization to church and home settings.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Future research should move from conceptual alignment to direct empirical examination at Melati Ceria Special School. A qualitative case study could document how teachers currently adapt Bible stories, prayer, worship, moral instruction, and Christian routines for autistic learners. Observations and interviews with teachers, parents, and—through accessible communication—students could identify which practices are already working and which require modification.

A second direction is the development of individualized faith-learning plans that specify observable targets, prompting hierarchies, reinforcement strategies, and generalization opportunities. Single-case experimental designs such as multiple-baseline or changing-criterion designs could be considered for selected skills when ethically and educationally appropriate. Such designs would make it possible to examine whether a specific intervention component is associated with meaningful changes in participation without assuming that one result applies to every learner.



A third direction concerns collaboration with churches and families. Future studies should examine whether school-taught routines transfer to family prayer, Sunday worship, youth activities, and service opportunities. This is particularly important because the literature on religious inclusion emphasizes that meaningful belonging occurs in community rather than only in classrooms

Finally, future scholarship should explore how ABA can be integrated with contemporary inclusive religious education approaches. Recent work on inclusive religious education continues to emphasize adaptive pedagogy, accessible curricula, and spiritual inclusion for autistic learners. A promising research agenda would therefore combine behavioral measurement with qualitative accounts of meaning, belonging, agency, and spiritual expression. Such integration could produce a more complete model of Christian education that is both evidence-informed and genuinely inclusive.

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