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Sexual Education in Classroom; the Perception of Indonesian Students

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ABSTRACT

Recently, some social problem such as teen pregnancy, baby dumping, sexual transmitted disease had been increased in number, particularly in Muslim country such as Indonesia. Some people suggest that sex education might be one of the solutions to overcome the problem. Thus, this study focused on exploring the young Muslim Indonesian's perception on the implementation of Sexual education at school. Five young Indonesian IUM students from various school backgrounds were interviewed together. In general, the findings reflected the openness and awareness of Indonesian Muslim student toward having sexual education in class room. The respondents perceived that sexual education at school is needed by young people. There are different opinions on which school level the education should be introduced first. At the end, they proposed an integrative approach to be covered in the module

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Introduction

The rate of teen pregnancy is rapidly increasing each year. In the United State, according to Live Science (2012), the average rate of 400,000 teens between the ages of 15 and 19 gives birth each year [1]. Teen pregnancy cases also appear in Muslim Countries recently. In Indonesia, country with the largest number of Muslim population, a study was conducted by the Child Protection Commission (KPAI), found that 21.2 percent of girls with the age range from 14 and 18 have had at least one abortion, and that 62.7 percent of teenagers have had sex by the age of 18 [2]. In Malaysia, in the early 2010, there were 111 cases of teenage pregnancies had been reported. Even, another problem had appeared in relation with this teenage pregnancy issue that is baby dumping. Pak [3] reported that on average, 100 babies are being abandoned each year in Malaysia.

Sexual transmitted Disease such HIV AIDS had been increased by year. Indonesian government stated that there are 82.870 HIV cases and 30.430 AIDS cases were recorded from 1987 to 2012 [4]. Meanwhile, 9.494 Malaysia women are reported as HIV/AIDS positive by the end of 2011 [5]. Hence, it is quite worrisome if the cases continue grows and then leads to another problem. Many people viewed that sex education is one solution which we can give a try. They defined Sex education as a way of educating about sexuality to the people. Recent study was conducted in Malaysia by Mutalip and Mohamed [6] involving student of a particular university. They found that 49.3% of respondent agreed that sexual education can be one of the solutions to solve the social problem among youngster.

There was news recently reported regarding this issue. The Indonesian's minister of education and culture, Mohammad Nuh viewed that the Indonesian people does not need yet sexual education since it could promote impropriety among the country's youth [7]. Therefore, the study was aimed to explore how young Indonesians perceive about sexual education at school.

According to the author, this study was important since the issue of sexual education become debatable in the country. Apart from that, by understanding young people perception

toward the issue, hopefully it would help in developing a proper sexual education to society, particularly to the youth.

Literature Review

The idea of introducing sexuality in the classroom setting had been done in western countries since few years back. Some western people believe that the basic attitude toward sex is that it should be pleasurable, wanted and safe [8]. This view then leads to the emergence of 'Safer sex' worldview. Primarily, it is allowing people to do any sexual activity in secure manner, by using contraceptive devices for instance. Other mentioned that the main objective of safer sex is merely to prevent venereal disease and teen pregnancy.

Currently, there are two approaches of sex education in western school, namely Abstinence-only program and comprehensive sex education program [9], [10], [11]. The comprehensive program is basically derived from 'safer sex' worldview. So it focuses on the matter such as contraception, sexual behavior, abortion and sexual transmitted disease awareness. On the contrary, the abstinence program emphasizes on the abstinence from any sexual activity before marriage.

Discussing the appropriate age for receiving such education, some said it can be started once children reach puberty, while others said once entering school. In her book, Measor [12] studied that most of European young people wanted to have such education earlier than they received on that time. In the schools where the study conducted, sex education programs were delivered in year 9 or 10 (age 15-17). However, another party said that sex education should be taught from a very young age onwards [8].

Nowadays, the comprehensive program becomes more popular than the abstinence program [13]. Martin and colleagues [14] compared these two approaches and found that the comprehensive approach is likely encouraging teens to practice safer sex, that is doing sexual activity in secure manner and avoid the risk. It teaches the students not only about HIV/STD Awareness, Biology and reproduction, and General behavioral skill (including communication skills, decision making and goal setting, and general risk avoidance), but also about contraception, sexual behaviors and sexual alternatives to

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Intercourse as well. Constantine and colleagues [10] provided some data from national survey in their study. According to the survey, almost 90% of secondary students who received sex education in school reported that they receive information such as on contraception, HIV and STD, date of rape or sexual assault, emotional management of being sexually active, and birth control.

A few years back, one study was conducted on several secondary schools in Britain by Measor and colleagues [12]. The pupils' participant even demanded sex education should cover such issues as safer sex practices and about the various contraception devices. They found that in sex education program, students were taught various contraceptives devices, such as pill and condom, including the demonstration how to use it. On the contrary, the abstinence approach focuses on discouraging student to practice sex before marriage. This traditional abstinence education program emphasizes on delaying the sexual activity, teaches the harm of casual sexual activity, and encourages students to view sexuality as part of a process of developing intimacy and lifelong commitment. This program teaches that teens should not be sexually active until they marriage. It also teaches the healthy relationships and benefits of marriage, and dangers of drugs and alcohol as well [14].

Dyson and Smith [15] found that most of causes of the problem may root from parent's attitude. Sometimes, some parents still avoid discussing about sex with their children since they think it is taboo. Other may feel embarrass, unpleasant, and ambivalence on how much to say on the topic [16]. As a result, young people then may choose to not discussing the matter to their parents and prefer to obtain the information from others, such as teacher and most of the time, their peer [17]. Furthermore, study also showed that parent who talk and discuss to their children about sexuality may delay the sexual risk behavior [18].

Hymowitz [19] concluded that the current comprehensive sex in schools is likely related to the rise in teen sexual activity. Some researchers at the Washington even thought that the current comprehensive sex education program is primarily like promoting that free sex is normal and acceptable [20]. According to Athar [21] sex education in America is failed because it is lack of moral value. It does not cover sexual dysfunctions and deviations and the institution of marriage. A study found that religion is likely to influence the adolescence's view on sexuality [22]

The current study then focused on exploring the perception of Indonesian student toward sexual education in school.

Theoretical Framework

Adolescence is a time when young people start experience significant changes in terms of physical, emotional, and cognitive. Puberty causes some physical changes and hence, it affects their emotional condition. In addition, their cognitive function also becomes more developed. They start to develop their own identity, their own belief system, and their own place in the world. Furthermore, their behavior also becomes more in lined with their values and beliefs. As a result, their understanding and view toward the world and life grow to be more mature compare to children. In other world, these lead to the development of morality.

Kohlberg describes several stages in explaining human moral development [23]. The first level is preconventional, in which morality is based on reward, punishment, and favor. Usually occurs during childhood.

The second level is Conventional level, experienced by the adolescence and young adult. In this stage, moral judgment is based on compliance with the rules and value of society. It consists of two stages. Stage three and stage four. In stage three, called as 'good child orientation', the primary concern is being nice and gaining approval. Young adolescence defines what is good and bad, right and wrong, still based on parent's order. Focus on living up to social expectations and roles. Apart from that, they also start to judge people by looking at the intention and motive behind.

In the meantime, Stage fourth, called as law-and-order orientation, moral judgment derived from social order, law, and justice. In this stage, young people start to understand that if everyone violates the law, it will create chaos. Thus, they will follow the rules, do their duty and respect authority to maintain law and order.

The last is post-conventional level. It usually occurs during adulthood, and considered as highest level of moral development. The individual develop personal standard for right and wrong, and define morality in terms of abstract principles and values that apply to all situation and societies. It consists of Stage five and stage six. Stage five explaining about Social Contract and Individual Rights. At this stage, people begin to account for the differing values, opinions and beliefs of other people. When law is consistent with the interest of society, people will obey it. However, if law does not express or support the welfare of society, people tend to disobey it.

In Stage six, called as Universal ethics orientation, moral reasoning is primarily based on abstract reasoning and universal ethical principles such as dignity, respect, justice, nonviolence, and equality are the guiding force behind the development of a personally meaningful set of ethical principles. Individuals at this level of development believe these ethical principles should guide their actions above all else, including previously established rules, laws, and social contracts. At this stage, people follow these internalized principles of justice, even if they conflict with laws and rules.

By referring to this theory, particularly the second and third level, this study will examine the view of Muslim adolescence student toward sexual education, in relation with the moral development.

Methodology

In-depth interview was conducted to explore the perception of Indonesian Student of IIUM regarding the topic. There were five students who willingly participated in this study. The respondent's age range was from 17 to 20 years old, and came from different parts of Indonesia. Three of them were female, while the rest were male.

Using purposive sampling, the respondents were selected with certain categories, one came from Islamic Government School (labeled as R3), two students came from Non-Islamic Government School (R1 and R2), another one came from Islamic Private School (R4), and the last one came from Non-Islamic Private School (R5). The aim of choosing various school backgrounds was basically to explore various views of students. They were gathered in one place, and then a focus group interview was conducted for about one hour. Tape recorder was utilized.

Result & Findings

The respondents were asked about their perception on having sexual education class at school. From the interview result, there were several themes emerged

Necessity and acceptance

In general, most of the participants agreed that sexual education at school is necessary, even though some of them seemed not that familiar with the subject. R1 mentioned that he ever involved in a sexual education program conducted by semi-government organization. It was such actually a school-to-school road show, in which they provide information regarding sexual, health and reproduction. Since the respond from the audience was positive, and that the program supported by public and government as well, thus he concluded that sexual education is actually needed by young people.

Others said that the reason for having such education was rooted from the increases social problem, or in this case was sexual problem by youth in the society, such as pre-marital sexual activity, baby dumping, rape, and teen pregnancy. They assumed that by giving and providing the correct information about sexuality, it may help young people to control their sexual impulse. Besides, it may also act as guidance for student to direct them doing what is good and supposed to do, avoiding the sexual misconduct.

Furthermore, they also mentioned that young people should be acknowledged about sexuality matter since most of parents refuse discussing such topic at home. Talking openly about sexuality is still considered as taboo in most eastern countries. As result, young people will go look for another sources to obtain the knowledge. It may create a problem later on if they get the information from misleading sources, such as internet, or the worst from those who did sexually misconduct. Therefore, the respondents agreed that it is better if school can provide such education, since it can help student to find the correct information about sexuality. Teacher can guide them.

This finding seemed to be similar with some previous study. Parent's attitude toward sexual education can actually influence children's behavior and perception about sexuality [15]. Some parents, particularly those who live in eastern countries, still avoid discussing about sexuality with their children since they think it is taboo. Others may feel uncomfortable and uncertain on how much to discuss it with their children [16]. They worried that children may become inquisitive. As a result, young people then may choose to not discussing the matter to their parents and prefer to obtain the information from others, such as teacher and most of the time, their peer [17].

However, there were some other respondents who quite disagreed with the idea of giving sexual education at school. According to them, it might look like such an encouragement for the young people to know more about sexuality. In other word, it may boost their curiosity to explore more. One of them mentioned that sometimes, having such education was not that effective to hindrance people from engaging in any pre marital sexual behavior.

"If we look at the western sexual education, I don't see that sexual education at school is effective. Because the students already know about it, they then can manipulate or find the way how to prevent pregnancy for example, or how to do sex safely. They also can misuse the information. So it is a kind of ineffective" (said R4)

"Yes. It even will make young people, the adolescence to explore more about that thing. We know right, adolescence has high curiosity" (said R3).

Nevertheless, at the end these two respondents fairly accepted on the idea of sexual education at school in some extents. That it should be not totally adopt the western method, and that it should be in accordance to religion, cultural value,

and human development, which will be discussed in detail in other section.

This finding then may support the study of Mutalip and Mohamed [6]. They found that most of the youth agreed that sexual education can be one of the solutions to solve the social problem among youngster. Nowadays, young people seemed to be more open to accept and to learn about sexual education, particularly from formal education institution. Students believed that by providing such education can help young people to understand more about their sexuality and to prevent them from engaging in any sexual misconduct. Byers and colleagues [24] mentioned in their study as well that almost all students accepted and supported the Sexual Health Education at school.

School Level

Regarding to the question when or which level to start, all respondents had different opinion. Majority of them agreed that sexual education should be delivered in senior high school, where student usually had reach maturity, by the age of 15 to 18. One respondent argued that students in Junior high school, averagely their age is 12 to 14 year old, were already appropriate to be given such education.

"Usually, students start to like each other, become sexually attracted, and reach puberty during junior high school time. So I think it is appropriate to educate them about this matter by this time" (said R1).

As for another respondent, he believed that sexual education even can be introduced earlier than that, to primary school student. Due to the increase of sexual misconduct by young people in the society, not only by adolescence but children as well, so perhaps it is better to educate them earlier. However, it should be delivered in accordance to their level of maturity, either physically, psychologically, emotionally, or intellectually. Loeber & Deligeoroglou [8] mentioned that sex education should be actually introduced since from a very young age. In a study of young students in New Brunswick, Byers and colleagues [24] found most of them thought that Sexual Health Education should be started in middle school, while the rest believed it even can be began earlier in elementary school. Meanwhile, a study by Mutalip and Mohamed [6] revealed that most of Malay young people suggested introducing sexual education to upper secondary school student. Another argued that lower secondary school students are actually had been appropriate to expose to this module, while others agreed to start sexual education as early as in primary school.

Everyone in this current study had various opinions on the appropriate grade level to start sexual education. It may mean there is no such definite definition or rule regarding the time. It can be started at any moment when people or society view it is needed.

Integrative approach

Regardless whether the respondents accepted the idea of providing sexual education at school or rejected it, they were still asked about the possible appropriate method if school should offer such education to the student. Generally, there are six points could be highlighted from their answer.

Firstly is religion as foundation. All of them agreed that the spirituality and morality of student should be built first. They emphasized that before given such education, student should be educated first about religion and morality as foundation. They believed that by developing the spirituality, it can work as an immune system, or inner control which helps young people to control their behavior and attitude.

As Muslim, the respondents held a view that any premarital sexual activity is forbidden (haram) in Islam and considered as a

sin. As they believed in the life of here after, people should be responsible for every conduct since it will be judged by Allah. For Muslims, the word of Allah is more prior rather than the human law. The good and bad are not defined by society but Allah. Thus, all respondents believed that the establishment of moral understanding or spiritual intellect based on religion can be such a control to prevent people from committing sexual misconduct. The respondents' perception then supported the opinion of Athar [21]. According to him, sexual education in western countries is failed to decrease sexual misconduct because it is lack of moral value. For them, sexual activity outside marriage is as long as done in safe manner. In other word, not causing pregnancy or Sexual transmitted disease. It is contrary to the Islam teaching, that any premarital sexual behavior is prohibited (haram) and considered as sin.

According to Haglund and Fehring [25], those who viewed religion as very important aspect in life, practiced religion frequently, and held religious sexual attitudes were less likely to engage in any sexual misconduct. Thus, the strong building of spirituality and morality actually play an important role in helping young people to abstain from sexual misconduct.

Secondly, majority of the respondents agreed that the subject could be integrated with some other school subjects such as biology, and Fiqh. In other word, sexual education is not necessarily independently delivered in a special single class. Teacher will insert and relate the material of sexual education into those subjects. In Biology class for instance, student will learn about human reproduction in which it is indeed a part of sexuality lesson. In Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence), chapter of Thaharah (Cleanliness), cover some topics such as menstruation, blood, obligatory take bath, which are correlated as well with the content of sexual education. The reason was having a special and regular class for discussing the sexuality matter seemed to be quite ridiculous and still

"Talking about sexuality openly is still taboo in our society. Besides, it is quite ridiculous. I bet, if teacher comes to the class and starting to lecture about sexuality, the student will make a joke on that. We feel shy to ask. Others may laugh at us. It is embarrassing" (Said R3)

This result of study was quite similar with the finding of Mutalip and Mohamed [6]. They found that the majority of their respondents agreed the module of sexual education should be incorporated with other core subjects apart from integrated with the religious or morality subject.

Thirdly, they mentioned that it was preferable if sexual education delivered by the subject matter expert rather than by regular classroom teacher. The expert was referred to the medical staff (doctor), religious knowledgeable Muslim (Ustadz), scientist (biologist, biology teacher), sport teacher, psychologist, and other experts from various related disciplines. The reason was beside delivered by more reliable sources, students are likely to get broader and more comprehensive picture from various angles regarding the sexuality.

As for the next, respondents suggested the sexual education could be conducted in an interesting program, not only in regular classroom discussion. For instance like a road show, or one day seminar. At this moment, sexual education is clearly delivered independently as a single subject matter. In this type of program, the subject matter will be discussed openly with the invited experts for example.

Furthermore, they suggested as well that sexual education should be delivered in accordance with the level of human development. The material lesson is better given accordingly with student's level of maturity in order to be easily accepted

and understood. The educators then should consider the physical aspect, psychological factor, intellectual maturity, as well as spiritual development of the receiver. The higher level of education, the more detail and comprehensive the education will be given. It also helps the students to be more understanding to their current level of development.

Lastly, they proposed that the sexual education at school should be designed with the awareness of cultural norm and value. The respondents also emphasized that the material would be not similar as in the western school countries. One respondent said it was not necessary for young Muslim student to know about contraception devices like the western student do. *"I don't agree if student is introduced to contraception. As I know, sexual education in western country is openly discussed and covered excessive information like I said before. Because student can misuse the information. And I think that is why sexual education becomes ineffective in decreasing sexual problem within society. I do agree with sexual education, but it should better not totally follow or adopt the western method"* (said R5)

This proposed module still emphasized on the abstinence of premarital sexual activity. However, it was combined with several other methods in order to be more effective.

Martin and colleagues [14] explained that the western comprehensive approach covers the subject not only about HIV/STD awareness, biology and reproduction, and general behavioral skill (including communication skills, decision making and goal setting, and general risk avoidance), but also about contraception, sexual behaviors and sexual alternatives to intercourse as well.

Thus, the respondents agreed that the appropriate sexual education at school would be only by having several modules mentioned above. That was by inserting religion or moral value as well as cultural norm, integrating with some other school subjects, delivered by the subject matter expert in an interesting program, and should be in accordance to the level of student's maturity.

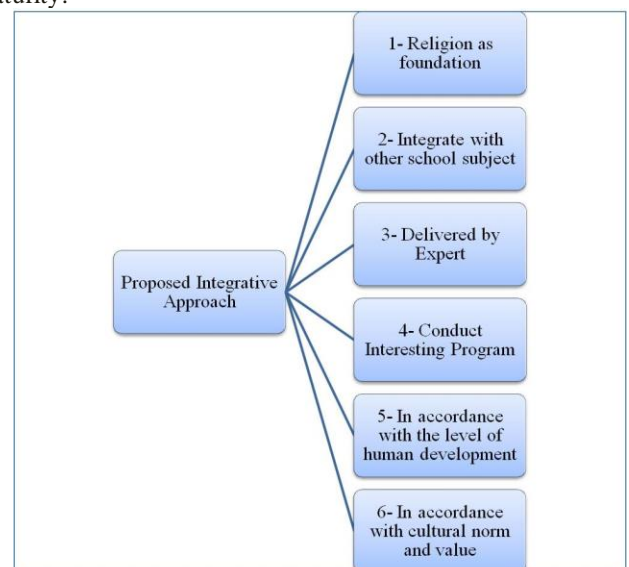


Fig. 1. A proposed integrative approach for sexual education at school

Relating to the theoretical framework, it seemed that the respondent reached the stage four of Kohlberg's moral development theory, law-and-order orientation. It seemed that the majority of respondent agreed the root of the emergence of sexual education is to overcome the sexual problem caused by young people in the society for instance baby dumping, sexual

transmitted disease, abortion, and teen pregnancy. Such problems, they believed was the result of violating the law, particularly the Islamic law. Muslim believed that any sexual activities outside marriage is prohibited and considered as adultery (zina) thus it is sinful. "Do not go near to adultery. Surely it is a shameful deed and evil, opening roads (to other evils)" (17:32). They believed because people, or in this case was young Muslim, did not obey this rule, thus it created problem (chaos) in the society. Moreover, they believed as well that the objective of such Islamic rule basically to create and protect the safety and welfare of society.

Furthermore, the finding of this study also showed that the respondent's views on sexual education were also likely to be influenced by religion, regardless of their school background. Thus, this finding supported the previous study of Smercenik and colleagues [22]. A study by De Visser, Smith, Richters, and Rissel [26] found that people, who attend religious services and becoming more religious, tended to view premarital sex as negative.

Additionally, in discussing about sexuality, the respondents tended to refer to the Islamic rules and obey them. They stated that the proper approach of such education to be implied in Muslim community primarily should be derived from Islamic teaching. In general, we may say that the respondents in this study seemed to reach the fourth stage of moral development, since their view on average was based on Islamic law. Young people start to understand that if everyone violates the law, it will create chaos. Thus, they will follow the rules, do their duty and respect authority to maintain law and order. In this case, the respondents believe that the sexual problem in the society appears since people do not follow the law, particularly the Islamic law.

Conclusion

From the findings above, we then may conclude that the perception of Indonesian student on sexual education in school basically reflected their openness and awareness toward the issue. They viewed sexual education in school is necessary for young people to help them gaining correct information and deeper understanding on sexuality in a proper way. Furthermore, the finding also appeared to support the previous studies. Family and religion play an important role to the formation of adolescent perception on sexual education.

In the eastern countries, talking about sexuality is still considered as taboo. Some parent usually avoids having such discussion to children because they think it is embarrassing. However, people in recent days, particularly the youth, become more open toward the matter. Their curiosity will lead to the wrong path and create trouble if the guidance is not given. Thus, the idea of offering sexual education at school becomes a topic discussion.

In Indonesia, this issue still debatable. Those who disagree with the idea usually come from old generation. On the contrary, the young people agree to have sexual education at school. The finding in this paper may support the statement that in general, young Indonesian accept and need formal education on sexuality. However, they still emphasized on the family involvement in this learning process. Apart from that, they preferred to have the module based on religious and cultural value.

At the end, it was expected that this may contribute to the development of proper sexual education in school.

Limitation Of Study

Since the respondents were Indonesian adolescence who currently studying in Malaysia, this perhaps may influence the

result of the study. Therefore, perhaps it is better to involve directly those adolescences who are staying in Indonesia for future study.

During the group discussion, male and female respondent were interviewed all together. This probably may affect their responds. Overall, further study should be conducted to explore more regarding this topic.

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