

Facing the Realities of the Modern World: An Approach to Sex Education for Elementary School Children in the Digital Age

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Abstract: In the current condition, it is important for parents to be open and ready to discuss the topic of sexuality with their children due to easy access to information through technology and to prevent sexual abuse. Parents need to be responsive in answering their children's questions about sexuality, provide accurate information that is appropriate to their children's understanding, and teach positive values related to sexuality. Comprehensive sexual education at school is also important to provide correct understanding and help children develop healthy attitudes towards sexuality. This study aims to explain how to approach sex education for elementary school children in the digital era in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of good and bad sexual knowledge and help children develop a positive attitude towards sexuality. The research method used qualitative observation and literature review techniques. The results show the need for comprehensive and responsive implementation of sexual education by parents and teachers. Parents need to be open and ready to talk about sexuality with their children. In contrast, schools need to provide sexual education that is appropriate for children's level of understanding, provide accurate information, teach positive values related to sexuality, and help children develop a healthy attitude towards sexuality.

Keywords: Sexual Education, Elementary School, Sexual Literacy

Abstrak: Dalam kondisi saat ini, penting bagi orang tua untuk terbuka dan siap dalam membahas topik seksualitas dengan anak-anak mereka karena akses mudahnya informasi melalui teknologi dan untuk mencegah pelecehan seksual. Orang tua perlu responsif dalam menjawab pertanyaan anak tentang seksualitas, memberikan informasi yang akurat dan sesuai dengan pemahaman anak, serta mengajarkan nilai-nilai positif terkait seksualitas. Pendidikan seksual yang komprehensif di sekolah juga penting untuk memberikan pemahaman yang benar dan membantu anak mengembangkan sikap yang sehat terhadap seksualitas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan cara melakukan pendekatan pendidikan seks pada anak sekolah dasar dalam era digital agar dapat memberikan pemahaman yang menyeluruh tentang pengetahuan seks yang baik dan buruk serta membantu anak mengembangkan sikap yang positif terhadap seksualitas. Metode penelitian menggunakan kualitatif dengan teknik observasi dan kajian literatur. Hasil menunjukkan perlunya penerapan pendidikan seksual yang komprehensif dan responsif oleh orang tua dan guru. Orang tua perlu membuka diri dan siap untuk berbicara tentang seksualitas dengan anak-anak mereka, sementara sekolah perlu menyediakan pendidikan seksual yang sesuai dengan tingkat pemahaman anak, memberikan informasi yang akurat, mengajarkan nilai-nilai positif terkait seksualitas, dan membantu anak mengembangkan sikap yang sehat terhadap seksualitas.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Seksual, Sekolah Dasar, Literasi Seksual

INTRODUCTION

In this modern era, every need of life increases rapidly, forcing many parents to work. This has led to an increasing trend in the number of dual-income parents in Indonesia, reaching 87.7% in 2021 and 87.62% in 2022 (Statistics Indonesia 2022, 2022). Parents' busy schedules impact their limited time with their children. One of the consequences is that parents need more time to provide education and assist children's growth and development. (Mustari, 2019). However, with limited time and difficulties in answering children's questions about sexuality, appropriate and age-appropriate sexual education is an urgent need.

The rapid development of mass media and electronics today also seems to have an impact on the behaviour patterns of adolescents at the elementary school level, especially in terms of sexual behaviour. This phenomenon can be seen in various vulgar movie shows, the widespread distribution of pornographic videos, and the easy access to age-inappropriate scenes through the internet. In this context, one of the problems that arise is that most parents have difficulty in answering their children's questions about sexuality. The limitation in providing the right answers causes parents to divert their children's attention to less relevant things so that children are increasingly interested in pursuing more complex questions. According to Helmi et al. (1998), teaching sexual education is an effort to educate and direct sexual behaviour properly and correctly. That is, sexual behaviour that emphasizes physical and psychological aspects will cause or result in healthy sex for both self and others. So when the delivery of sexual education is delivered according to the age level of each child appropriately, it can reduce sexual violence in the surrounding environment.

In Indonesia itself, according to data reported by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), there were 9,588 sexual abuses against children (Map of the Distribution of the Number of Violence Cases by Province, 2023, 2022). Forms of sexual violence behaviour that often occur are rape, social intimidation, sexual harassment and prostitution (Hidayat, 2020). Several studies explain the impact of sexual abuse on children, such as victims are likely to engage in risky sexual relationships, participate in prostitution, and are likely to be sexually abused as adults (Goodman & Fallot, 1998). They are also more likely to engage in early sexual activity (Fergusson et al., 2013). Seeing the urgency of the problem of sexual violence in children, it is appropriate for schools to read the need for sexual education by providing facilities in various ways, such as age-appropriate sexual education materials or learning media, as well as recommended sentences about other sexual education.

One of the results of research conducted by Zelnik and Kim (1982) shows that if parents are willing to discuss sex with their children, their children tend to delay premarital sexual behaviour. Likewise, Fisher's research (1986) shows that adolescents tend to imitate the behavioural attitudes of their parents. However, it is unfortunate that the information obtained through mass media is sometimes only piecemeal and generally only emphasizes sex narrowly. The issue of sex is not that simple and narrow.

In today's world, parents need to be open and prepared to discuss the topic of sexuality with their children due to easy access to information through technology and to prevent sexual abuse. In answering children's questions, parents need to adopt a responsive approach, provide information that is accurate and appropriate to the child's level of understanding, and teach positive values related to sexuality. In addition, the role of comprehensive sexual education at school is also important to provide correct understanding and help children develop healthy attitudes towards sexuality. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe how to approach sex education for elementary school children in the digital era in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of good and bad sex knowledge and help children develop a positive attitude towards sexuality. This research will involve participants from parents, teachers, and education experts to collect data on the challenges and needs of providing sexual education to children in the digital era.

METHOD

This research method uses qualitative methods with observation and literature review techniques. According to Mustika (2021), the observation and literature review focus on the learning, socialization, mentoring and supervision stages of sexual education in primary schools. The qualitative method was chosen to understand the existing problems more deeply and identify factors influencing sexual education at this level.

Through observation techniques, researchers can directly observe the implementation of sexual education in elementary schools, including the teaching strategies used, the materials delivered, and the interaction between teachers and students. Meanwhile, the literature review helped researchers obtain relevant information from existing sources, such as books, journals, policies, and previous research. This approach enabled the researcher to gain a holistic understanding of sexual education in primary schools and identify shortcomings and potential improvements that could be made.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on a literature review conducted by Balter et al. (2006), there is a comparison between normal sexual behaviour and anxiety related to sexual behaviour in children. Some of the common sexual behaviour findings that appear in children include the desire for close physical contact, touching genitals, looking at other people's genitals, showing their genitals to others, trying to touch women's breasts, and masturbating.

In this context, educators and parents need to provide education on sexuality from an early age to provide understanding to children and protect them from unwanted criminal acts or inappropriate behaviour. In addition, sexual education also aims to develop healthy aspects of sexual development in children. The development of sexuality is not only limited to understanding the organism but also involves other broader aspects of understanding identity, feelings, interpersonal relationships, and values related to sexuality.

Providing educational values in the development of sexuality in early childhood is very important to support individual growth. Proper sexual education at an early age can help children understand and appreciate their bodies, build healthy relationships with others, recognize personal boundaries, and understand the concept of consent. Thus, good sexual education at an early age can provide a strong foundation for the development of healthy sexuality in adulthood.

According to Astuti, Sugiyanto, and Aminah (2017), several materials can be given to early childhood in sexuality education. One of the materials that can be delivered is introducing children to the differences between men and women. This can be started by explaining the differences in clothing worn by men and women as a sign of gender identification. Furthermore, sexuality education materials can also include explanations about body parts, functions, purposes, and how to maintain cleanliness and health. Children need to be given an understanding of certain body organs in the context of sexuality, such as genitals, ovaries, testicles, and so on. This explanation can be conveyed in simple language and according to the child's level of understanding.

It is also important to teach children about maintaining privacy and personal boundaries. Children need to understand that there are body parts that should not be touched or shown to others without consent. They also need to understand the importance of respecting others' privacy. During the sex education process, educators and parents need to create an environment that is safe, supportive and open to questions. Children should feel comfortable asking any questions or concerns, and educators or parents should be prepared to provide accurate and appropriate explanations to the child's level of understanding.

Sexual education in children is still debated in some circles, and educators sometimes avoid teaching about it. However, expert opinions emphasize the importance of sexual education that is instilled early on. SIECUS (Sexuality et al. of the United States) in Pop & Rusu (2015) provides several topics that can be taught in sexual education for ages 5-18. These topics include Human Development, body anatomy, physiology, and gender identity; relationships: Explaining family, friends and other social relationships; Personal skills: Teaching values, decision-making, communication, assertiveness, negotiation, and caring for others. Sexual health: Provides information on reproductive health and how to protect oneself from sexual violence. Society and culture: Discusses sexuality and society, gender roles, sexuality and the law, sexuality and religion, and diversity.

In addition, according to the National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement (2016), there is knowledge that can be given to children regarding sexuality. Some of the points mentioned are Age 3-4 years: Children begin to understand the concept of differences between girls and boys, so it is necessary to provide an understanding of these differences; 5-6 years old: Children still have difficulty in clearly understanding gender and the moral values that are instilled. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the rules by the prevailing norms regarding sexuality and the role of children is needed.

In today's school environment, the state of sexual education still faces significant challenges. Sexual education is not taught appropriately at the level that should require such knowledge in a lesson. Instead, sexual education is often only delivered when there are fatal problems committed by students, such as the dissemination of indecent photos or videos, inappropriate sexual behaviour and so on.

Based on the observation at school X, when such a situation occurs, the school will take steps to provide a discussion on sexual education as a response to the incident. However, this approach tends to be reactive and unplanned. Also, not all teachers at the school provide sex education information to students who should be facilitated with such education. This can lead to inconsistent, unstructured information and may not cover important aspects such as gender equality.

In addition, the discussion of sexual education in the school curriculum is generally limited to the 6th-grade level in the reproductive material of Natural Science learning. Thus, students only receive information related to reproduction specifically, such as reproductive anatomy, menstruation, fertilization, and fetal development. Therefore, other important aspects of sexual education, such as wise decision-making or prevention of sexual violence, are often not discussed thoroughly. One of the relevant materials in sexual education for children is about body parts that can and cannot be held. This material aims to teach children about privacy boundaries and the importance of respecting their bodies and the bodies of others. Children are taught to understand that there are parts of the body that are private and should not be held by others without permission. Children are also taught the importance of reporting to an adult if anyone violates these boundaries.

The approach to sexual education for children should be tailored to their developmental level and delivered sensitively and in inappropriate language. Children begin to have questions about sexuality from an early age, and parents or educators need to provide sexual education in an educative manner. According to Marlina et al. (2018), they have emphasized that sexual education can begin when children start asking questions about sexuality. However, it is important to remember that children's questions are not always expressed verbally, and parents or educators must be sensitive to their expressions.

Meanwhile, according to Irsyad (2019), the stages of sexual development in children can be described as follows: 1) The oral phase, which occurs at the age of 0-1.5 years, is characterized by sexual sensations that focus on the lips and mouth of the child. In this phase, children tend to like to suck fingers or put objects in their mouths. 2) The anal phase, which occurs at 1.5-3 years of age, involves sexual sensations associated with the rectum. Children in this phase often explore these sensations through holding and expelling faeces. 3) The phallic phase, which occurs at around 3.5 years of age, involves sexual sensations focused on the genitals. In this phase, the child begins to realize the difference between female and male genitalia. 4) The latent phase, which occurs at the age of 6-11 years, is characterized by the child being less focused on sexual sensations. At this stage, the child focuses more on cognitive and physical growth and development. 5) The genital phase, which occurs at the age of 12 years and above, marks the child's entry into a more mature stage of sexual introduction. Therefore, it is important for parents or educators to actively respond to and understand children's questions or expressions related to sexuality so that sexual education can be delivered appropriately and by the child's developmental level.

The materials for sexual violence prevention and informed decision-making in strengthening sexual education include the following: providing an understanding of sexual violence, identifying dangerous situations, learning about personal boundaries, increasing self-awareness and self-confidence, and informed decision-making. Children need to be taught about the definition, forms and examples of sexual violence and the importance of reporting dangerous situations to trusted adults.

Children are also taught about actions to take if they receive inappropriate or unwanted touching, such as avoiding, saying "no", and reporting it immediately to an adult they trust. Learn about their rights in determining personal body boundaries and respecting the boundaries of others. Children's self-awareness and confidence are also enhanced to deal with unsafe situations, such as saying "no" firmly and asking for help if needed. They are also taught about wise decision-making, including considering actions' consequences, considering available options, and making safe and positive decisions.

Such learning is very important as it demonstrates the love, care and protection parents or teachers show children. By providing comprehensive sexual education, children can feel supported in keeping themselves safe and secure. In addition, learning about personal boundaries and respecting the boundaries of others also helps form healthy and dignified relationships between individuals. Through increased self-awareness and self-confidence, children become better prepared and able to face unsafe situations with confidence and the ability to protect themselves. With wise decision-making, they can avoid the risk of sexual violence and make positive decisions in terms of health and interpersonal relationships.

Educators and parents must create an open, supportive and safe environment where children can ask questions and get accurate and age-appropriate information. From the above statement, to achieve the aims and objectives regarding sexuality, teachers need to package interesting and meaningful learning to children.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This research has a clear objective, which is to describe the approach to sex education in elementary school children in the digital era with a focus on a holistic understanding of good and bad sexual knowledge, as well as the development of positive attitudes towards sexuality. The main findings of the study show that proper sex education at an early age has significant benefits, such as helping children understand and value their bodies, build healthy relationships with others, recognize personal boundaries, and understand the concept of consent. The implication of this study is the need for comprehensive and responsive implementation of sexual education by parents and teachers. Parents need to be open and ready to talk about sexuality with their children. In contrast, schools need to provide sexual education that is appropriate to children's level of understanding, convey accurate information, teach positive values related to sexuality, and help children develop a healthy attitude towards sexuality. However, this study has limitations in the method used, which is a qualitative method with observation and literature study techniques. Therefore, conducting further in-depth research, such as teaching media development research or explanatory research, is recommended to broaden the understanding and obtain more comprehensive data. Teaching media development research can help produce innovative and effective learning resources in sexual education for children in the digital era. In addition, explanatory research can explore the cause-and-effect relationships and factors that influence sexual education in elementary school children in more depth. By conducting further in-depth research, we can enrich our understanding of sexual education in primary school children and develop more effective approaches to addressing the challenges faced in the digital era.

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