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Sex and Gender Education for Autistic Children to Live Their Daily Lives

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ABSTRACT

Teachers play an important role in the success of the learning process. The role of the teacher is not only as a facilitator but also plays a role in the success of inclusiveness in learning. This study aims to examine the role of teachers in learning toilet training for children with autistic disabilities. Toilet training learning contributes to children's cognitive, emotional and social development. Children with autistic disabilities in the case of this study have more complex difficulties processing learning as well as in understanding the concept of human body and anatomy, which ultimately affects self-perception. But often the difficulty in delivering the teaching of abstract concepts is a major challenge for teachers. This research uses a qualitative method with interviews as its approach. In addition, this study also used a three-stage coding analysis, starting from the open coding, axial coding, and selective coding stages to help interpret the data obtained. The results also show that teachers play a role in building a communicative and safe learning environment for children with autism. In addition, teachers also take a role in collaboration with therapists, and parents in ensuring the success of the learning process.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of disability is a very sensitive topic to raise. Both in global and national forums, the topic of disability is often marginalized and only a brief topic of discussion. Every individual should have equal rights and opportunities in terms of maximizing their potential, including individuals with autism. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is one of a variety of disabilities that interfere with a person's nerves so that it has an impact on individual development both in terms of communication and how to socialize (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Initially, autism has its own levels and distinguishing features according to the symptoms. The levels of mild, moderate, and severe autism were later merged into one and known as ASD (Stein et al, 2024). ASD is a spectrum term because of the variety of autistic symptoms in everyone. ASD disorders also make an individual have limited interests, activities, and behaviors, so that repetition often occurs in the individual (Ostry et al, 2022).

Disorders such as repetitive behaviors and difficulties in establishing social interactions in ASD often appear when an individual is in childhood and last for life (Ambarsari, 2022). Although it lasts a lifetime and there is no cure, early intervention can be given to ASD children (Juwita et al, 2023). Through therapy, special education, and family support, interventions are provided to prevent symptoms from worsening. In addition, interventions are intended to help ASD children develop their independence and life skills (Irwan, 2022). This independence and life skills are also closely related to the provision of sex education.

The societal paradigm considers sexuality education as a taboo to be taught in early childhood. Especially if sex education is taught to children with disabilities such as autism. However, the times have made this issue more relevant in today's global scope, that sexuality education is an urgent matter to be delivered to build children's life skills and independence (Seiler-Ramadas et al, 2021).

Many children with autism have difficulty performing daily activities without assistance (Tathgur & Kang, 2021). The main difficulties are in maintaining personal hygiene and recognizing physical changes during puberty. With good sex education, they can learn the importance of maintaining hygiene, understanding the menstrual cycle in girls, and maintaining the health of their reproductive organs. Sex education for children with autism not only covers physical changes in the child's body during growth, but also involves the child to understand emotions, build communication and social interactions related to gender identity and sexuality (Houtrow et al, 2021). Simple, clear, and structured explanations can help autistic children be more confident and calmer when dealing with existing problems and apply them in everyday life. Therefore, the learning strategies and methods applied must be adapted to the way children learn. One form of practical approach that can be used in learning sexuality for children with autism is through toilet training programs.

Toilet training program is the first step in teaching children to be sensitive to physical needs, such as urination and defecation. Toilet training is also useful for teaching children with autism early concepts about the body, privacy, and independence (McLay et al, 2021). Teaching sex education in toilet training also teaches how children recognize their body needs, maintain hygiene and reproductive health. In this case, teachers have an important role in helping children improve skills according to their special needs.

Teachers are not only facilitators of learning but also agents for successful inclusive learning (Thomas, 2021). They are not only responsible for providing practical instruction on toilet use, but also for shaping a safe and effective environment. Thus, for children with autistic disabilities to gain the skills to be independent and confident in daily life, teachers must actively participate in providing support and guidance to children.

Previous research focuses more on sexual teaching for adolescents with autism and the role of parents in educating autistic children. Among them are research (Nugraheni & Tsaniyah, 2020) on the Urgency of sex education in adolescents with autism, My child is "different" (the experience of being a mother of an autistic teenager) (Lasha & Masykur, 2022), Psychoeducation on sex education for adolescents with autism spectrum disorders to increase knowledge about sex education in parents and teachers (Mustofa et al, 2020). Although there have been studies that discuss teaching sexuality in early childhood with autism such as the implementation of sexual education in early childhood with special needs (Utami, 2023), research on similar topics is still limited. Making research on sexuality education in early childhood is very interesting to raise.

In Indonesia, the grounded theory approach has also not been widely used in the study of inclusive education for children with autism. Therefore, this study integrates sexuality education ideas into a toilet training program, which also focuses on developing independence, privacy, and early gender identity recognition. This teaching uses different ways to help autistic children understand their bodies in everyday life. Teachers not only help the child, but they also work together with parents and therapists to create a safe and flexible learning environment. This shows that cross-field cooperation is essential to meet the needs of children with autism. To understand local issues in inclusive education, grounded theory methods are added to the literature that usually focuses on universal approaches.

2. METHODS

Single Subject Research was used in this study. Figure 1. Explain about research flow in this study, teachers who deal with students identified with ASD and experience barriers in terms of understanding sexuality will be the research subjects. Qualitative Research method with the use of semi-structured interviews to collect research data and grounded theory approach were used in this study.



Figure 1. Research Flow

The data in this study were also analysed using data triangulation. Qualitative research is useful in exploring understanding of existing social phenomena based on the perspective of the subject being studied. In line with this, researchers use a grounded theory approach model to build theories that appear in the data that has been obtained from the research process. The aim is to identify patterns that appear from existing data and are natural, not derived from hypotheses that have previously been designed. By using the grounded theory approach, researchers can build an inductive theory based on empirical data collected in the field and allow reflection on research results based on real conditions that exist. The use of this method was also chosen to dig deeper into the perspectives and perceptions of the subject in the context being raised.

In addition to digging deeper into the experiences, perspectives, and perceptions of the subject in the context being raised, on the other hand this interview also still provides space for freedom of aspiration for participants. This interview was held flexibly so that the researcher could follow the flow of the participants' conversation topics, but still adhered to the framework of the question instrument that had been compiled previously. The instrument framework consists of several open-ended questions that are not rigid in nature so that the researcher can also explore the discussion during the interview. The instruments used had previously been given criticism and suggestions by experts before finally being used in interviews. Participants in the interviews were selected using purposive sampling technique. Participants were selected based on their experience and knowledge related to the research phenomenon raised. In its implementation, interviews with participants were conducted via virtual face-to-face via google meetings. Interviews were recorded based on permission from participants to ensure that the data obtained was accurate and complete without reducing the points conveyed. The duration of the interview conducted for data collection lasted about 27 minutes.

The interview recordings that had been obtained were then transcribed and proofread to ensure that no conversation points were missed. Transcripts of interview conversations that have been rechecked are then processed using a grounded theory approach. The stages of data processing using grounded theory include several stages, namely the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the first stage or open coding, a detailed breakdown of the interview transcript, is carried out to find phrases or sentences that are considered important to discuss. Each segment of the conversation was differentiated by providing codes to explain certain concepts or themes that emerged from the data. This initial coding was intended to find as many relevant discussion points as possible.

After the open coding stage is complete, the data is processed again at the axial coding stage. At this axial coding stage, the points that have been collected are classified again into the appropriate discussion. The aim is to find a bridge of connection and causation of the points that appeared in the initial stage of open coding. After categorizing the points, the researcher then tries to see and understand the relationship between the points found and the context of the issue being studied.

After seeing and understanding the relationship between the points at the axial coding data analysis stage, the data entered the final stage of grounded theory, namely selective coding to focus on the core points that had been categorized previously. Researchers determine the most relevant categories and are able to formulate the core linkages with other points that have been categorized. Data categorization will increasingly focus on one central theme that emerges from the data until a complete and comprehensive theory is formed.

The data that has been obtained after the implementation of grounded theory must still be confirmed for authenticity and truth, so researchers use data triangulation. Data triangulation in qualitative research is useful in reducing and determining research results from bias. Various data sources, methods and even perspectives are involved in the data triangulation process to assess the harmony of findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Understanding the Meaning of Inclusion

Every human being has the same rights as fellow creatures of God, one of which is the right to education. Education is a right for every individual, including people with disabilities. People with disabilities are also entitled to the right to attend school either in special schools or regular schools. Inclusion-based education is one approach to education that is more original and critical to increase flexibility for all children with special needs, including children with disabilities. The existence of inclusive education presents greater opportunities and expectations for students to interact regardless of background, ability, and physical and mental conditions. Inclusion emphasizes the elimination of marginalization to create a more equal society. The principles contained in inclusion include balance, active participation and tolerance of existing diversity. The principle of balance emphasizes that every individual has the right and deserves to be treated fairly. The principle of active participation emphasizes the involvement of every individual without exception in making decisions that affect their lives. Meanwhile, the principle of tolerance of diversity includes respect and respect for individuals. "...the school is not an inclusive school, so the school is like a normal school, a general school, but it only accepts students who have special needs."

The understanding of regular schools that accept students with disabilities is different from inclusive schools. The difference between the two lies in the educational approaches and goals that exist for students with special needs or disabilities. Although there are similarities between the two in providing educational opportunities for all children, there are fundamental differences in the perspective and implementation process. Regular schools that accept students with special needs or disabilities have key characteristics. The main characteristic lies in the limitations of adaptations, facilities, and handling. Public schools do not have a comprehensive design that supports students with disabilities. The existing curriculum and methods in schools are designed with little or no modification for non-disabled students. Support facilities in schools also do not fully support students with special needs. Examples include the absence of shadow teachers, ramps, elevators, and bathrooms for students with wheelchairs in the school. Regular schools often handle students with disabilities if their parents or caregivers request it.

In inclusive schools, the approach is more holistic and ensures that every student has an equal opportunity to learn and develop. The main characteristics of inclusive schools are that they use a proactive approach to learning, there is a variety of curricula, there are supporting facilities provided by the school, and schools are more aware of the differences that exist. In a proactive approach, the school is more actively involved in designing the curriculum, methods and facilities needed in teaching to suit the needs of the child. The main focus is on education that prioritizes accessibility for all children regardless of physical, mental or intellectual differences. Inclusive schools also strongly encourage students to not only attend lessons but also actively participate in all activities within the school.

The field findings obtained by the researcher included the participants' understanding of inclusive schools. Participants explained that the school where they teach is a regular school that accepts children with special needs and is not an inclusive school. However, there are facilities such as psychologist services to help monitor children's development. In addition, the school has also provided support in the form of a shadow teacher who focuses on the child, so that learning is optimized and delivered to the child without disrupting the learning of other students.

3.2. Teachers' Role in Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment

The achievement of inclusive learning cannot be separated from the role of the teacher. A common understanding of the role of teachers is to educate, guide, be a role model and at the same time a facilitator for their students. Moreover, teachers in education play an important role in shaping the attitudes, character and understanding of their students. Teachers as individuals who have a close relationship with children at school must have sensitivity and understanding of the situation of their students.

"...the teacher understands because there are differences between asd children and other children, there are differences". "Yes, yes, if the way of teaching is different, the teacher there happens to really understand, which means that if the way of learning is different, it cannot be equated, they are already aware, they already know". "...developmentally, they are different from other children developmentally in terms of capturing information, they are also different so ee we as teachers must have our own strategies for teaching asd children".

In the case in this study, teachers play a role in creating an adaptive learning environment for children with autism disabilities. Students with autism have different and unique characteristics and abilities from one another. Not all autistic children have good verbal skills, some children often have difficulty in communicating with other individuals. In these cases, teachers are required to have sensitivity to the needs of their students. This sensitivity is useful for adjusting the way or learning process according to the needs of autistic children. Adjustments made can be in terms of using audio or visual aids that are of interest to children and help children in the learning process.

Not only supporting academic abilities, teachers also play a role in supporting children's skills and independence in carrying out daily activities, such as going to the toilet alone, holding or picking up objects and so on. So we can know that teachers have a very complex role in meeting the special needs of autistic children. The right support will help autistic children progress optimally in an inclusive educational environment.

3.3. Sexuality Education for Autistic Children

Sexuality education in society is still a taboo issue to discuss. Especially if the teaching of sexuality is given to early childhood with autistic disabilities. People often overlook the importance of sexual education given early on to children, they assume that children are too young, and it is impossible to understand the context conveyed in the learning of sexuality. However this education is very important to provide an early overview of the importance of maintaining a healthy body, understanding the body's response, understanding personal boundaries and so on.

"... then he likes to hold his hand into that li where."

Children aged 3-6 years enter the early stages of psychosexual development where they begin to learn to control their bowel function, notice gender differences, and develop their sexuality skills. It is natural that at this stage the child begins to ask questions such as why women wear skirts while men do not. In addition to asking questions, psychosexual development can also be seen when children begin to hold their private body parts.

"...Well, in daily activities, we teach it by ee if you want to pee, you go to the bathroom". "...right, we have also taught how to go to the bathroom and then if you want to go to the bathroom, you will take off your pants, skirt, you have been taught so yo yowes just take it off". "...yes, we let the children go to the bathroom by themselves".

Teaching sexuality education from an early age can prevent sexuality crimes. One way to teach sexual education to children is through toilet training programs. Toilet training program is the first step in teaching children to be sensitive to physical needs, such as urination and defecation. Toilet training is also useful for teaching children with autism early concepts about the body, privacy, and independence. Teaching sex education in toilet training also teaches how children recognize their body needs, maintain hygiene and reproductive health. In this case, the teacher has an important role in helping children improve skills according to their special needs.

4. CONCLUSION

This research discusses a combination of issues that are still considered taboo by some parties to convey. However, the times have made a better view of this issue because it is relevant in a global scope. From this research, every individual has the same rights as God's creatures, without exception, as well as children with autism disabilities. Children with autism disabilities certainly have different characteristics from non-autistic children either explicitly or implicitly. The provision of teaching in early childhood with autistic disabilities certainly requires a variety of approaches that are conceptualized and focused on the characteristics and needs of children. The right strategy can foster and develop children's abilities in terms of communication, interaction, and the ability to carry out daily activities independently.

Autistic children are often marginalized and victimized in crimes including sexuality. Sex education for autistic children does not only cover physical changes in the child's body during growth, but also involves children to understand emotions, build communication and social interactions related to gender identity and sexuality. Toilet training in this case becomes a practical strategy as an initial effort to introduce sexuality education to children. Toilet education is the first step in teaching children to be sensitive to physical needs such as urination and defecation. Toilet education is also useful for teaching children with autism early concepts about the body, privacy, and independence. Sex education also teaches children to recognize the needs of the body, maintain hygiene, and maintain reproductive health. Thus, children with autistic disabilities can learn how to live their daily lives independently and confidently.

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6. AUTHORS' NOTE

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