

THE REVIEW MODEL ON THE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN SEXUAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Parental involvement has been seen as a factor that contributes to the quality of children's education. Collaborations between parents, teachers and schools are seen to be able to help parents of students with special educational needs (SEN), in providing exposure and sexual education for their children. Parents are the closest people to students with SEN; therefore, it is very important to understand how parents can help their children dealing with sexuality issues. To address this need, this paper is written with the aim to discover parental involvement from the perspective of sexual education through Epstein's Parental Involvement Model and from the spiritual aspect through Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Model.

Keywords: special educational needs, parental involvement, sexual education

1. INTRODUCTION

Asian community often regards sexual education as taboo – it is often considered as a sensitive topic to talk about openly. People with disabilities, especially teenagers with special educational needs (SEN), are always exposed to various sexuality problems such as their tendency to sexual abuse, the risk of sexual exploitation and the development of inappropriate sexual behavior.

Sexual education covers many aspects of life such as: anatomy, health, personal hygiene, reproduction, relationships, sexual response and religion. In Malaysia, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has taken the issue of sexual education more seriously and it has been introduced to secondary schools since 1989 and primary schools since 1994. It was known as Family Health Education before it was renamed as Sexuality Education in 2003. Since the term "sexuality" is considered negative, this sexuality education module has been renamed as Reproductive and Social Health Education (PEERS) or "*Pendidikan Kesihatan Reproduksi dan Sosial*". A study conducted by Salmi et. al (2017) revealed the inclusion of sexual education through PEERS was carried out in the teachings of several subjects including Physical Education and Health, Language, Science, Biology, Islamic Education as well as Moral Education. PEERS was aimed to educate and expose the students to their sexual and reproductive health by including topics such as reproductive health, emotional management, family, relationships, illness and safety.

The Malaysian Ministry of Health through the Malaysian National Adolescent Health Action Plan (2006-2020) has emphasized that sexuality and reproductive health education needs to be implemented to increase knowledge about sexual reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies each year. Students with SEN need to be exposed to knowledge and awareness related to sexual health from a younger age so that it can help them to avoid difficulties later in life; thus, to help them take care of their personal safety.

In 2021, the Department of Malaysian Statistics has revealed that the total number of sexual crime cases involving victims aged 18 and under has increased to 0.9 percent with 1,481 cases compared to 1,468 cases in 2020. It is quite alarming to observe the growing trend of sexual problems, especially for the community with SEN students. Without proper knowledge about sexual education, these children are at risk to be involved in sexual crimes either as victims or as perpetrators. This sexual problem can result in trauma, crisis or even addiction for students with SEN in terms of their emotions, cognitive, behavior and physiology.

Current data released by the United Nations Population Fund in 2018 shows a particularly worrying trend involving students with SEN. The data shown that girls and boys with disabilities are almost three times more likely to be victims of sexual violence where the girls face a higher risk. A report from the Swedish Public Health Agency in 2019 has also found evidence of sexual harassment on the Internet where sexual harassment and abuse occurs among young people with intellectual disabilities between the ages of 16 and 30. A study by the African Child Policy Forum on violence against children with disabilities found that almost every young person (between the ages of 18 and 24) interviewed, had been sexually abused at least once and more than once in their life.

Fariza et. al (2022) found that in Malaysia, it is a challenge for parents because the issue of sexuality is often avoided, and parents leave the task entirely to teachers to discuss this issue with their children. A study by Dwi Karina et al (2017) found that 18,000 children aged 11-16 believed that their parents should be their main source of reference to learn about sexual education followed by teachers and finally through health care specialists. The issue of sexual education needs to be dealt with systematically by parents because they are the closest individuals to students with SEN. Research by Didem Guven (2021), pointed out that parents have no knowledge and no preparation about sexuality education, for example the sexual development of teenagers with SEN, how to teach sexuality education at home and they need help from experts to help them to convey this information. At the same time, parents also feel worried about the issue of sexuality education, especially sexual abuse and pregnancy out of wedlock.

In addition to schools, parents are also encouraged to teach sexual education at their own homes. This is because teachers at school cannot focus their full attention on just one student and all aspects of sexual education cannot be fully taught. Therefore, as concerned parents they must shoulder this responsibility. However, parents have various challenges to continue this task. Parents have difficulties to convey sexuality information to students with SEN due to lack of knowledge. Students with SEN, on the other hand show various emotional, behavioral and cognitive reactions which are difficult to control and managed by the parents, most of the time. Lack of contact time with the children as the parents are working can be one of the reason and

parents have inadequate knowledge as well as training on this matter which leads to incapability to handle such conditions.

Some parents are not ready to talk about sex openly with their children due to the feeling of embarrassment, hence this leads the children to be more curious and seek the information from unreliable sources. The students with SEN will obtain information through their own reading or by watching porn videos secretly without their parents' knowledge. Following this problem, this study was conducted to examine the level of knowledge and parental involvement of students with SEN in sexual education.

Figure 1: Example of topic taught at school for Form 4 students



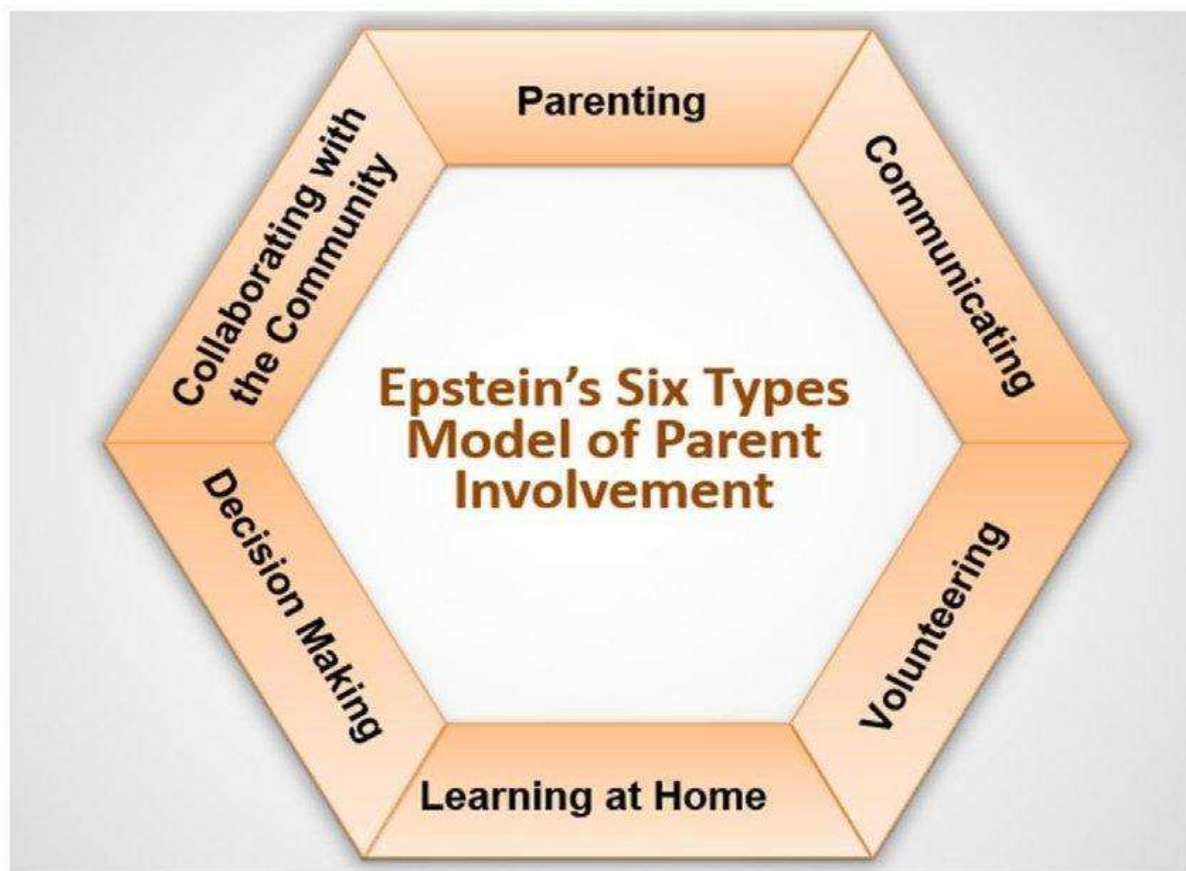
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Epstein's Parental Involvement Model

Previous studies have revealed that the participation of parents in matters of education contributes to the success of students with SEN. Parental involvement is also emphasized by modern studies such as those conducted by Joyce Epstein (Epstein et al. 2009). Based on the evaluation of Epstein's six engagement constructs, it can be concluded that communities and families not only need to get the right information, but they also need to participate in their child's progress in

learning, and collaboration must be seen as an important element in planning or organizing the education system. (Epstein, 2011).

Figure 2: Epstein's six types of parental involvement model. Source: Epstein et al. (1997).



2.2. Parenting

Parenting is a process of encouraging and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of children from infancy to adulthood. Parenting refers to aspects of raising children other than biological relationships. Parents' involvement in raising and educating children is a lifelong responsibility (Vance, 2018). The perception of responsibility for parental involvement may differ between cultural contexts; views on the role of the family, the amount of trust placed in teachers and the degree of centralization of the education system (Osama and Lucy, 2021)

In terms of sexual education for students with SEN, the support of schools and teachers in providing various information such as parenting skills, psychological counseling and knowledge about sexuality is very important. Schools can share with parents how to prepare an environment suitable for students with SEN to make it easier for their children to receive this new knowledge

comfortably at home. Through this educational program, the school can help parents by sharing knowledge and awareness about sexuality to their children.

2.3. Communicating

Trust-based communication is established between teachers, schools and parents for the purpose of determining any problems that arise, finding ways to deal with problems and providing students with assistance throughout the learning process (Fatma et al, 2016). Epstein (2011) describes communication as "two-way, three-way and multi-way communication that connects schools, families and communities". Teachers and parents can communicate in any way to discuss performance or doubts in teaching their children at home, anytime. According to Epstein (2009) schools can send periodic notices and flyers about any important school activities. Parents are also encouraged to share any health reports and educational history of their children with the teachers. Schools are also advised to update their web pages to provide the latest information and sexual education reference resources for parents and families. School holds meetings with parents at least once a year to further discuss the academic progress and behavior of the children. Since 2011, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has provided a platform for parents to see their children's progress at school through the School Examination Analysis System or "***Sistem Analisis Peperiksaan Sekolah***" (***SAPS***). Parents can obtain the latest scores of their children's achievement and based on this information they can have further discussions with the teacher for the purpose of improvement. Schools, through Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) and other NGO assistance need to play a role as educators to parents by taking the initiative to organize talks and counseling events especially on sexual education for parents to educate them on this topic. In return, they would be able to convey this information to their SEN children.

The use of online communication such as email and online chat, with the capacity to disseminate information, has been adopted by many teachers in their relationship with parents. The use of online communication has the potential to reduce some communication barriers and enable immediate resolution of issues in parent-teacher collaboration. This technology can also make both parents and teachers feel more comfortable when communicating because it is more personal because it is text-based, and any emotions or reactions can somehow be hidden behind the screen.

The school can start an initiative to provide online bulletin to parents in imparting knowledge about sexual education and parenting as one of the training methods for parents to establish this knowledge to their SEN children. There are times when parents themselves do not know the source to find this knowledge, let alone how to convey it to their children effectively. With this online parenting bulletin, parents can use it as a reference source.

2.4. Volunteering

There are three basic ways for individuals to do voluntary activities in education (Epstein, 2009). First, parents can volunteer at school to help teachers and administrators as tutors or classroom assistants. Second, parents can help in terms of fundraising for any event or help by sharing about school activities on social media or even in their community. Thirdly, they can participate as

spectators and attend any program held at school. Being a volunteer, it provides different types of learning that can increase human and social capital as well as self-collective efficacy.

Parents of SEN students who have experience or even expertise in the field of sexuality, for example a doctor can become a volunteer by imparting his knowledge through training or even a webinar session with other SEN parents. Schools can also get volunteer services from NGOs or hospitals to convey sexuality knowledge either directly to SEN students or through training to parents.

2.5. Learning at home

According to Epstein (2009), schools can help parents in sharing information and ideas on how to help students do homework, activities and planning related to the curriculum. Through this activity, it encourages parents to constantly communicate with the school about the curriculum and helps parents plan learning activities at home. The involvement of parents together in student learning activities at home can improve their relationship in addition, providing motivation for students to complete the assigned work. It indirectly makes parents aware of the importance of support, encouragement and guidance to their children. Parents who are involved in children's homework believe this activity will make a positive difference for children (Bandura, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parent involvement activities also focus on children's homework effort, completion and accuracy. Parents can use specific approaches to reinforce desired behaviors, including giving praise and extrinsic rewards. They may focus on increasing students' self-perception of their abilities and the value of effort (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2001).

Daniel and Joseph (2016) reported that through communication with the school and parent-teacher partnership programs, reading activity with the children produced the greatest impact on student achievement. The reading program between parents and children greatly influences the development of children's literacy during the beginning of school. Therefore, when parents and their children are learning at home, parents can introduce this sexual education in a relaxed manner and give advice to their children on how to face any unforeseen situation.

2.6. Decision Making

As part of the committee members of the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) or through the parent support group, parents can give their opinions and ideas in making any school decision for their children (Epstein, 2009). The school can appoint parents as collaborative partners in decision-making and channel their expertise, for example in organizing programs such as scientific programs, career transitions, motivational talks or talks related to sexuality.

2.7. Collaborating with the community

The school-community cooperation which involves various parties to find ways to share or transfer resources between schools and local companies i.e., NGOs; religious, cultural and other groups can also be a contributing source to this effort. There are two benefits of this collaborative community involvement. Resources from the community can be used to help schools, families,

and students, while the community can also benefit from those activities from the same group and individual. (Epstein, 2009). Collaboration between schools and the community is a necessity nowadays because students need to be equipped with various competencies (Maureen et al, 2020). Involvement from the community can encourage the development of children's learning in various places including at school and at home.

Schools and parents can work with companies such as sanitary pad manufacturers to hold talks on self-management during menstruation and related matters to sexual problems. A campaign entitled "The Bishesta campaign" was carried out in Nepal where it is a self-management campaign (menstrual hygiene management) for female students with SEN that is carried out together with guardians and other family members (Jane et al, 2021). This collaborative program has received a warm welcome from students and family members.

Figure 3: "The Bishesta campaign" poster campaign



Figure 4: Bisheta statue used during the campaign



2.8. Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Model

Imam Al-Ghazali was an outstanding physicist, philosopher of thought who produced scientific works in various fields, including theology, philosophy, mysticism, morality, and education (Siti Raudah et al,2021). The book titled *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, is one of his works in Islamic literature. Al-Ghazali wrote a lot about education issues where his famous works include *Fatihah al-'Ulum*, *Ayyuha al-Walad*, and *Ihya' Ulum ad-Din*. In *Ihya' Ulum ad-Din*, he began his writing with a description of the importance of knowledge and education. Al-Ghazali's idea of education in *Ihya'* revolves around three main points:

- i. Explanation of the advantages of education and knowledge compared to ignorance
- ii. Classification of education included in the curriculum program.
- iii. Code of ethics for educators and students.

In addition to what has been mentioned, Siti Raudah et al (2021) in her study also pointed out that, Al-Ghazali's educational goals include three aspects; i.e i) the cognitive aspect where it includes cognitive development such as intelligence and thinking ability; ii) the affective aspect, which includes the development of the heart, such as sensory and spiritual development; and iii) psychomotor aspects which are physical development such as physical health and skills. Aizan and Murni (2017) also discovered that Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Model has reminded parents to provide education to their children based on the Qur'an as well as Hadith and Islamic history. Parents are reminded to always observe their children's behavior, in terms of culture, especially from the current growth of rapid borderless mass media.

Siti Noor Farahin et al (2022) found that sexual education needs to be disclosed to children including SEN students so that they will be more aware and sensitive to Islamic law especially to halal and forbidden matters related to opposite sex relationships. Prophet Muhammad SAW has

taught Muslim that there are several guidelines on how to educate children about sexual education. For example, children need to be taught to ask for permission before entering their parents' room or anyone else's room. There are three situations in which children are required to get permission before entering their parent's room, namely before dawn, midday and after sunset. Those three times are when parents are resting, and they could be in an unprepared situation. Parents are advised to teach SEN students about this procedure so that they will understand better. SEN students also need to be trained to be aware of matters pertaining to aurah, and not to be involved in forbidden and immoral delinquencies. When the SEN students reach the age of ten, parents can separate their sons and daughters from sleeping in the same bed of different genders even if they are of the same flesh and blood because such it can lead to many indecent incidents. Siti Noor Farahin et al (2022) also emphasize the importance of SEN students who have been mumaiyyiz about the obligation of hadath bath and circumcision matters. Researchers also emphasize, as parents who are more inclined with the children, they are the most suitable individuals to guide these children compared to others. Parents are also advised to educate SEN students, especially their daughters, to understand the content of surah al-Nur, which emphasizes the preservation of dignity.

3. DISCUSSION

Epstein's Parent Involvement Model which includes these six categories provides a framework for schools to further improve the relationship between parents and schools. Epstein's model is seen to help improve relationships and encourage parents' involvement in school activities, especially those involving special education children.

Epstein's Parental Involvement Model emphasizes that the factors of parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and community will only be successful if teachers and schools use this framework to involve parents in the sexual education of special education students. Noelle (2018) found that the school is responsible for facing all the challenges from these six Epstein factors. If schools failed to take the initiative, parents will be left out of this ecosystem. Parents will face the challenge of providing the sexuality education as appropriate for their children. This study also shows that continuous efforts from the school will increase the involvement of parents with better and positive results. Several programs have been identified as effective in implementing the Epstein Parental Involvement Model. A combination of eight essential elements such as leadership, teamwork, action plan, plan implementation, funding, collegial support, evaluation and network are found to help make parental involvement related to sexuality education more successful.

Every human being was born as a tabula rasa and children, especially students with special educational needs, build their personality through their characteristics and behavior and their level of interaction with the surrounding environment. The people closest to them, the family, are the ones who will teach these children about their language, customs, traditions and religion. Therefore, Al Ghazali's philosophy strongly emphasizes that the primary responsibility for children's education rests with parents (Syah and Hamdi, 2016). Just like Epstein's Parental Involvement Model, Al Ghazali's Philosophy also confirms that it is the parents who will bear all the responsibilities and bear the burden of their mistakes in raising children, especially for students

with special educational needs. The next responsibility will be shared with the teachers. Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of childhood in the formation of personality. A good education will give children a good character and help them lead a righteous life; whereas a bad education will damage their morals and it will be difficult to bring them back to the right path. Hence, it is necessary to understand the special characteristics of this period in order to deal with children in an effective and strong way.

4. CONCLUSION

Epstein's Parental Involvement Model and Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Model are models that are very suitable for this study. The combination of models and philosophies used in this study can be developed and adapted to the practice of parents' involvement in children's sexual education activities at home, especially for students with SEN. The results of this study can provide knowledge and prepare parents to deal with the changes in the social culture of today's students.

The level of knowledge and readiness as well as the involvement of parents should be in line with the current educational needs, and this is no exception to sexuality education for children with SEN. The words of the Prophet SAW: "The child is like a white cloth, it is the parents who will shape it into a Christian, Jew or Magian." (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim). Parents are responsible for creating a good collaboration with the school. In addition, the models highlighted by Epstein and Al-Ghazali's Philosophical model are expected to provide useful knowledge in understanding the form of parental involvement as well as providing them with knowledge and preparation to jointly educate children with SEN in the issue of children's sexual education.

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