

Attitudes of Islamic Education Teachers towards Sex Education

**Siti Subaila Ihwani¹, Adibah Muhtar², Norhafizah Musa³, Zetty Nurzuliana Rashed⁴,
Ab Halim Tamuri⁵, Mohd Isa Hamzah⁶**

Faculty of Islamic Civilization, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia¹²³,

Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor⁴⁵,

Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia⁶

sitisuhaila@utm.my¹, adibah_dm@utm.my², Norhafizah.kl@utm.my³, zetty@kuis.edu.my⁴

ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, sexual health education is taught various subjects namely Islamic Education, Moral Education, Science, Additional Science and Biology. Teachers are not enthusiastic to deliver the right message on sexual health education. The topic is considered as taboo, which causes the teaching process to become incomplete, lack of depth and insufficient. The Islamic Education teachers were found not to have related the topic on a wider scale concerning sexual issues within the Islamic context. The present study examined the attitudes of Islamic Education teachers regarding sexual health education elements in secondary schools. The respondents of the study included 10 Islamic Education teachers using semi structured interview. The study has generated important empirical findings. This information is important to facilitate the comprehensive sexual health education in Malaysian schools.

Keywords: *sexual health education; Islamic Education teacher attitudes*

INTRODUCTION

Sex education has drawn growing attention in schools curriculum nowadays. The emphasis on the need of sex education becomes more significant when statistic related to moral issues such as free mixing, out of wedlock births, drug abuse and addiction, rape, theft, prostitution and out of wedlock sex start to increase rapidly from time to time. The desire to know more about matters related to sex is believed to be the source to this problem. In Western countries, most Muslim families who send their children to schools which execute the curriculum of sex education such as in England, the United States of America and Australia take the action to hinder their children from attending the 'sexual education' program in school [1, 2]. This happens because most sex education programs in school in the West are being opposed by Muslim parents and students [3, 4, 5, 6] A study conducted by Halstead and Reiss [6] supports the fact which states that Muslim families living in the Western countries do not allow their children to undergo sex education program in schools. They have the opinion that their children will be a better person without sex education because it opposes the real Islamic teachings. For Islamic countries, sex education is still not being taught widely such as in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. The elements of sex education are inserted in some subjects and discussed only superficially.

Sexual education has become a big issue in Malaysia over time since the country faces the highest number of sexually active teenagers, the problem of premarital pregnancy, the spreading of sexually transmitted diseases, the increasing desire among teenagers to have partners at young age, the rising number of illegitimate children and the cases of abortion. The subject of sex education is still in the discussion. The proposal on having a new structured and comprehensive sex education has been opposed by the Ministry of Education on 1 May 2010.

The Ministry of Education has developed a sex education module to be known as the "Family Health Education" in the government's in conjunction with the government's efforts to help teens keep themselves away from sexual crime and to improve their morale [7]. However, the implementation of sex education is still in the process of evaluation. It has not been fully implemented. The opinions and views of various parties are accounted for good result. The Ministry of Education has yet to determine what should be taught and who is qualified to teach sex education to students. In addition, the age at which students should be given sex education and the way to convey information about sex remain as question. Although there is no special subject entitled sex education in schools, the Ministry of Education has introduced subjects related to sexuality and reproductive health. Topics related to sex education are presented in a variety of subjects such as Health and Physical Education, Islamic Studies, Moral Education, Science, Additional Science and Biology. The sex related topics are is available in those subjects that discuss matters connected to physical health, sexuality, reproduction, and moral aspects of the relationship between the sexes [8, 9]. The purpose of this paper is to analyse whether sexual health education is actually being taught in Islamic Education comprehensively and to present the 'voices' of Malaysian Islamic Education teachers as they deliberated on the potential problems and possibilities of comprehensive sexual health education in Islamic Education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Malaysian societal perspective, research show that the HIV infection rate and AIDS cases are increasing rapidly among young people [10]. Up to June 2007, a total of 29,269 HIV infections and 2974 AIDS cases were reported among Malaysians below the age of 30 years [11]. The most recent research shows that adolescents are involved in romantic relationship outside marriage and many engage in unsafe sexual intercourse. Wong and colleagues [10] surveyed a total of 1,075 Malaysian young adult aged 15-24 years. They found that HIV/AIDS knowledge among the respondents was moderate with a mean knowledge score of 20.1 out of 32 points. The majority of young people in Malaysia appeared to depend on the public media (television, newspaper and radio) as their primary source of HIV/AIDS information [10]. In addition, the number of adolescents in Malaysia involved in sexual intercourse increase from time to time [12]. Their finding shows that the mean age of the first sexual intercourse is 15 years among secondary school students age 12 to 19. The growing incidence of premarital sex is a big issue from the religious point of view. Young people involve in premarital sex were found to have no equipped themselves with the knowledge and skills to safely negotiate sexual relations and this embodies a threat to their health [13].

The distribution of teaching among subjects related to the topic of sex education causes students not to view the sex-related matters comprehensively [14, 15] For example, a biology teacher explains the physical aspects, a legal and religious teacher explains the religious value and a moral teacher explains the social consequences of sex. Somehow these teachers repeat the same information in their teaching. According to Bennett [13] the absence of comprehensive sex education for youth augments both the dangers that they will have unsafe sex and the possibility that they will have premarital sex without being sufficiently informed of the consequences. Therefore, the implementation of sex education in the present situation in schools must be speeded up to tackle the problems concerning to promiscuity and unwanted pregnancies among young people [16]. Azizah Jaafar and Chan Siew Lee [17] studied students' and teachers perceptions regarding issues on sex education. Based on the findings of this research, it showed that 53.6% of the teachers explained that the content of sexual information from the books is al-

ready enough for the students to understand sex education issues. In contrast, 58.2% of them stated that the information given in the book do not fully covered the important aspects of sex education. This findings being support by other research which [18] showed that 95% of the respondents thought that sex education was not held in school formally. About 380 university students were involved in this study providing their evaluation and experience of sexual education.

The research also reveals that sexual education in classroom across Malaysia is mostly delivered through the Science/Biology and Islamic Education subjects. Teachers seem unwilling to teach sex-related topics due to ill-prepared and untrained to explain the topics in a proper way. The present sexuality education could not prevent teenagers from involving into illegal sexual activities. These findings are very important as they could contribute relate to a more comprehensive sexual health education in Malaysia. However, not enough research has been conducted on sexual issues in Malaysia.

SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION IN ISLAM

Discussion regarding the teaching and learning of sex education is allowed in Islam. In Quran and Hadith, there are many discussions related to sex especially matters associated with health such as praying, fasting, bathing, marriage, divorce, performing hajj, human relationships and many more [19, 20, 21]. Sex education in Islam is among the matters seen as crucial to be taught in educating children In ensuring that the Muslim community accepts the sex education as proposed in Islam, the elements which exist in the sex education should have Islamic values based on the teachings of Quran and Hadith [22, 5] Matters that are considered legal (halal) and illegal (haram) in Islam should be given emphasis in shaping a personality which has the right attitude and good conduct [23, 24].

QURANIC PERSPECTIVES

The Quran had dealt with different aspects of human sexuality in 65 surahs and discussing various topic in more than 400 verses directly or indirectly [25]. Some of the surahs and verses in which these topics are shown in table below:

Topic	Surahs/Verses
Creation of Adam & Hawa	Al-Araf 7:11; Al Baqarah 2:30-38; An Nisa 4:1
Marriage, Nikah & Spouse	Hud 11:40 & 71; An-Nisa 4:1 & 3; Al-Baqarah 2:221
Etiquettes of Sexual Realties Between Spouses	Al-Baqarah 2:187; Al-Araf 7:189; Al-Hadid 57:27
Pregnancy & its Duration	Al-Imran 3:6,37-38; Al-Haj 22: 1 & 5; Al- Araf 7:189
Matters Related with Marriage	An-Nisa 4:4; Al-Baqarah 2:236-237; Al-Ahzab 33:49
Sexual Hygiene & Toharah	An-Nia 4:43; Al-Baqarah 2:222
Rights of Women	An-Nisa 4:124,129,24
Rights of Parents & Children	Al-An'am 6:151; Al-Anfal 46:15
Sex, Gender & Feminism	Al-Mukminun 23:27;Al-Imran 3:35
Birth Control	Al-Baqarah 2:49; Al-An'am 6:151
Fornication	Yusuf 12:23-32; An-Nisa 4:15-17; An-Nur 24: 4-5

Islamic scholars have discussed issues related to sex and sexuality. Abdullah Nasih Ulwan [26] stated that sex education should be taught to children in a clear and detailed manner when the children have come to have the right time to understand matters. He defines sex education as:

“Teaching, explaining and giving reminders to teenagers about the issues related to sex, instinct, lust (syahwat) and its relation to marriage ... until they grow up in the condition of understanding the meaning of life. Teenagers know what is allowed as well as prohibited for them and they make the attitude and conducts of Islam as the practice of life.”

Sex education should be taught according to age level because the children's development varies in different ages. For example, at the age of 7-10 years old, children should be taught about the *adab* (manner) of asking for permission and the adab of sight. At the age of 10-14 years old, children should be taught to avoid and hinder themselves from lusts. The adab of sexual relationship can be exposed to them when they are 14-16 years old. When they have arrived at the adulthood or *akil baligh*, they need to be taught on how to take care of honor and self-respect [27, 28, 29, 30, 14]. Most scholars agree with the opinion proposed by Abdullah Nasih Ulwan who states that sex education for children should undergo three distinct stages. Based on these three stages, children should be given exposure to matters related to sex according to their age. If they are not educated and supervised well in every stage, it might cause them to be involved in activities related to sexual misconduct. Thus, all parties in the community should play their roles in giving appropriate sexual education in adherence to Islamic teachings; be it parents, teachers and the surrounding community. Children should be given exposure to matters related to sex at an early stage so that it can help giving clear understanding to them in leading a life as a Muslim. It can also become the guideline in their life in differentiating the matter which is halal and haram from the perspectives of the religion.

Muhamad Zahiri and Rahimi [8] defines sex education as a process of educating which looks at the matter of information (cognitive), internal understanding (internal spiritual/morality/consciousness) and also physical to the specified target group such as students as well as the public about the life conduct which is related to relationship between gender. Rokiah [30] states that sex education is a process to disseminate information, understanding, and teaching to certain group about matters related to relationship between two different genders. Amir Hasan Dawi [14] states that the word sex, sexual and sexuality are interconnected and are used interchangeably from one to the other. Sex according to him is a matter related to aspects of biology, sociology and psychology which shows physical differences of men and women. He states that sex is always connected to sexual intercourse, feelings, desire and other human sexual action. Ab. Aziz Mohd Zain and Yusmini [31] have the opinion that sex education should be integrated with the education of *akidah* (belief), *akhlak* (right conduct) and *ibadah* (religious action). Individuals who practice the right conduct will indirectly practice healthy sexual conduct which is abiding the law of religious teachings. Strict religious practices will be able to hinder oneself from getting involved in sexual misconduct.

Based on the stated definitions, it can be concluded that sex education is the process to educate and disseminate knowledge about aspects related to sexual matters between men and women which needs to be fundamentalised on the concepts of faith and belief to Allah the Almighty who created human and is ever-knowing about the human Himself. Apart from that, the purpose of sex education is to nurture the appropriate lust and desire which adhere to the teachings of Islam so that they becomes the blessed lust and desire, which give peace and pleasure in life and thus hindering human from adultery which is truly hated by Allah the Almighty.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted among Islamic education teachers in secondary school. In this study, Islamic Education teachers in Malaysia were invited to participate. The inclusion criteria required that the teachers included in the study were teaching Islamic education to students from one until form five in Malaysia. This study used a structured interview. It is based on total of ten respondents. The interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed. Data was collected from the structured interview and the instrumentation of the research was on structured questions.

The questions were as the following:

1. Has sex education been taught at school?
2. Why sex education is important?
3. What is sex education elements in Islamic education?
4. Who should be responsible?
5. Should we need other sex education subject?
6. How do you explain sexuality aspects during the lessons in the classroom?
7. What is the problems in teaching sexuality aspects in Islamic Education?

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis of this research aims to explain the sexual health education in Islamic Education from Malaysian secondary schools. The existing sexual health education in Malaysia which is known as ‘Family Health Education’ can be precisely described by all respondents [15]. The respondents expressed the view that the school curricula have involved sexual health education. They perceived that topics related to sexual health education are presented in a variety of subjects such as Health and Physical Education, Islamic Studies, Moral Education, Science, Additional Science and Biology. All respondents expressed that sexual health education elements in Islamic education could protect Muslim students from any sexual misconduct if the topic is being taught comprehensively. The respondents mentioned that sexual health education elements are included in various subject to promote good and healthy lifestyle, to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy before marriage, and prostitution. The respondents also agreed that the existing sexual education is not comprehensive.

The respondents were asked to identify the problems to developing a comprehensive sexual health education in Islamic education. Too much dependancy on teachers’ role in teaching sexuality aspects is considered as the major problems. Parents agreed that schools should provide comprehensive sex education to educate pupils regarding the elements of sexuality Islamic Education teacher are seen as the individuals who are more responsible for delivering effective knowledge of sex education than parents. Most of respondents expressed that the responsibility to teach sex education elements is not only for Islamic education teachers. Other teachers who teach other subjects which discussed sex education elements should also be aware of their responsibilities and play their roles to deliver good and accurate understanding about sexuality to students. These subjects should impart religious or noble values in order to give great impact on students’ values, attitudes and behaviour. The methods and approaches should be implemented appropriately in the teaching of sex education for students to receive accurate, clear and useful information.

Another problems envisaged by the Islamic education teachers is the curriculum itself. The ‘reproductive and social health education’ introduced by the Malaysian government only encompasses the biological facts of life, and neglects meaningful discussions about emotions,

relationships and other aspects of sexuality [15]. A further problem is the impact of the mass media and popular culture among teenagers [3]. It is going to be challenging for teachers in providing Islamic understanding on sexual issues.

Different interpretations on sexual health education elements in Islamic education are also considered as a problem among Islamic education teachers. All respondents agreed that sex education elements have been taught in Islamic education subjects. The respondents agreed sex education elements covers marriage issues, parenting skills and Islamic family laws. All respondents also view male/female relationship and adultery as part of sex education elements. Nonetheless, the opinion of respondents regarding other topics which considered as sex education elements varied. Four respondents, despite the topic agreed by all respondents, perceived the topics of dress code as not one of the sex education elements. Six respondents mentioned that sex education elements are covered under the topic about cleanliness. Table 1 shows the distribution of answers of all respondents by topics. None of the respondents, viewed preserving one's integrity and respect others as sex education elements in Islamic education. The distribution of the topics for sex education elements in Islamic education was based on a research done by Muhamad Zahiri [8].

Table 1. Distribution of respondent answers by topic

Topic	Respondents									
	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
Cleanliness	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Male/female relationship	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Preserve one's integrity	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Respect others	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Adultery	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dress code	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
Marriage issues, parenting skill, Islamic family law	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The problem of non-effective teaching on sexual health education depends on the strategies and methods used by the teachers. Most respondents agreed that they taught sex related topics based on what are necessarily found in textbooks only. According to Johari et.al [18], there were two factors causing sexual health education to be taught vaguely in classrooms namely incomplete subject matter and ineffective teaching methods. Many respondents suggested there should be a special training for teachers to teach sexual health education elements to increase teachers' understanding of the concept of Islamic sex education. The respondents also emphasized the importance of education and the way the message is delivered [32]. All respondents mentioned that the central issues are the quality of the curriculum, methodological and pedagogical guidelines and the professionalism of the teachers.

The lack of male Islamic education teachers is also considered as a problem to deliver comprehensive sexual health education [18]. Research shows that class segregation between male and female leads to more effective teaching sexual topics. The aims of segregation is to

counter any feelings of embarrassments or awkwardness on both the teachers and the students. Most of secondary schools in Malaysia have more female Islamic education teachers than male. All respondents perceived class segregation between male and female students in teaching and learning sexual health education is impossible to be implemented.

In order to investigate the perspectives of Islamic education teachers, the researcher asked the question 'Do we need other sexual health education subject?' None of them agreed to have one single sexual health education subject. The respondents suggested several topics to instill sex education elements in Islamic Education. The opinion of respondents regarding sex education subject varied. Some suggested that the topics discussed in sex education elements in Islamic education should be reviewed and improved. Some topics proposed by the respondents are the establishment of a healthy and safe lifestyle, and the topic of sexual abuse and its prevention. Others perceived that the existing sex education elements in Islamic Education are enough to give understanding on sex education according to Islamic values. They thought that there are no need for any changes.

In developing comprehensive sexual health education, all respondents agreed that Islamic education teachers should overcome the feelings of embarrassment or awkwardness in the teaching and learning process. They have the desire to remove the taboo stigma in teaching sexual health education. Sexual health education is held casually in Malaysian schools because of teachers' attitudes [18]. They felt so ashamed to explain the information on sexual health education and they avoid discussing the topic deemed as a taboo. Therefore, students are not given enough information, and are lack of Islamic values and misunderstanding about sexual health education as their guidance to face the real world. The respondents suggested special training is needed to train Islamic education teachers to learn effective teaching method. Teachers should be knowledgeable about Islamic teaching to prevent students' misconception which contradictory to Islam [15]. An effective educational process requires effective interaction between both a teacher and student. Based on a study by Ab Halim et. al [32], teacher-centered teaching method is utilized more as compared to student-centered approach within the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. Becoming competent in communication is crucial for Islamic Education teachers in order to create an active and interesting learning environment.

A separate sexual health education is required to encourage a developmental approach to sexual health education [3, 15, 18]. Some respondents perceived the suggestion to have segregation of class could be possible if we have more male Islamic education teachers. Lessons can be done by separating the male and female students. This is because there are topics in sex education that area taught by male and female teachers who are lacking of their knowledge. For example, there is a lack of knowledge among male teachers who explains the relevant period, fertility and sexual organs of female students. Similarly, female teachers, are lack of appropriate discussion about sex and prevention tools in relation to male sexual organs. Amir Hasan Dawi [14] suggests that an effective sexual health education, can be implemented when male teacher teach male students and female teachers teach female students.

Teachers and parents should have commendable qualities as role models to their students and children. The teacher's and parent's actions are always observed by students who guide them. Studies conducted by Ab Halim et al. [32] showed that the methods utilised by the most highly educated and effective moral education in Islam is follow-up. It could help students a sense of self-control from being influence by the current social problems. In contemplating teachers teaching of sexual health education, some respondents discussed how collaborative

work between teachers and parents would be an opportunity to confront and dispel students' misconceptions about Islam's position on sexual health. In Malaysian context, parents are unwilling to talk to their children about sexuality and too much depends too much on schools to discuss the issue [15]. Both teachers and parents should remind students and childrens of the dangers of doing forbidden things such as adultery, illicit sex, homosexual relationships, prostitution and so forth.

CONCLUSION

This study identified the problems and possibilities in developing a comprehensive sexual health education. The study shows that there is no need to have one single sexual health education subject. There were difference views on sexual health education elements in Islamic education. Although some respondents viewed that the existing curriculum should be revised and improved, other respondents viewed it should be remain and unchanged and does not require revision. The major concerns addressed were over the contents and methods of teaching and the training that should be underwent by Islamic education teachers.

The study results suggest that attitudes can be changed through training because an attitude is an essential element for effective teaching and learning. Perhaps, special training can help Islamic education teachers acquire the skills needed to deal with their difficulties regarding teaching sex education. It is expected that, Islamic education teachers will be better trained and their attitudes towards sex education would be much more positive which allow them to understand that they have greater responsibility for providing sexual health education from the perspective of understanding Islam. Although there are many subjects that are taught topics related to sexual health education in schools, the Islamic Education subject look more inclusive and refers to the teachings of Islam as contained in the Quran and the Sunnah. The Islamic Education teachers are willingly to collaborate in working together to improve their teaching practices. Therefore, the Islamic Education teachers need to understand their role and perceive sexual health education positively in order to establish and develop students' understanding on sexual health education based on religious values.

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