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Foreword

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Foreword

This proceeding is compilation of elected papers written in Arabic, English and Indonesian languages from the first International Conference of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia: Reforms, Prospects and Challenges on December, 2015.

The collected papers accentuate the topics of the Aims and Model of Islamic Education, Teaching Experiences from Classroom in Islamic Education in Islamic Education Institutions and Reforming Islamic Institution in an Era of Globalization.

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Finally, we expect this proceeding to be worthy reading and consuming for the readers.

Malang, December 27, 2015

Dr. H. Nur Ali, M. Pd

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INTRODUCING ISLAM TO CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEED

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Abstract

Children with special need have similar right to get the opportunity to participate in religious education, to understand Islam as their faith. The religious education is applied in either inclusive class, special school or homeschooling. The choice of schooling depends on several factors such as the academic level, economic and family background. However, the problem is not related to where they can get the religious education but how to make their learning effective. It is due to the fact that they require teacher's competence and experience to understand their individual needs and abilities. The children especially those with autistic spectrum disorder demand for careful teaching preparation, various techniques and effective assessment method. This paper elaborates the complexities and some alternatives to handle the religious education for children with special need by referring to their special way of learning. This is because they are not merely disable, but they have special feature requiring special condition to encourage their learning success. The condition covers the strategies such as consistent structure, visual aids representing abstract ideas, reliance on literal interpretations of religious concepts and using familiar images to introduce Islam. These strategies are matched with their learning characteristics as visual spatial learners.

Keywords: special need children, visual spatial learners, autistic spectrum disorder

A. INTRODUCTION

All children has the opportunity to participate in religious education, including those with special need. The religious education is applied in either inclusive class, special school or homeschooling. The choice of schooling depends on several factors such as the cognition, economic and family background (Indah, 2007). The severity of the disorder they suffer may influence the learning pace as it is affected by the cognitive competence. The different learning pace becomes one consideration to choose the suitable education method. Parents attempt to put their children in the best school also depends on whether or not they can afford it. When it comes to economic factor, parents have a lot to consider as the facilities of education are still limited in Indonesia. The family background also holds an important role in choosing the type of schooling which have different philosophical bases.

Special school is an option for the access of religious education. However, the number of special school which is available is still limited. Availability concerns with the access related to transportation and finance. It is due to the fact that there is no data base related to the number of children with special need in each region in Indonesia

(Republika, 2014). The latest data of the number of state special school (SLB) recorded by the The Ministry of Social Welfare is in 2008 summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. State Special School in Indonesia

DKI Jakarta	3	Central Kalimantan	8
West Java	25	South Kalimantan	11
Banten	3	East Kalimantan	6
Central Java	34	North Sulawesi	2
East Java	9	Gorontalo	4
DI Yogyakarta	53	Central Sulawesi	5
Aceh	11	South Sulawesi	20
North Sumatra	18	West Sulawesi	2
West Sumatra	14	Southeast Sulawesi	8
Riau	5	Maluku	5
Kepri	1	North Maluku	6
Jambi	8	Ball	8
South Sumatra	16	NTB	9
Bangka Belitung	6	NTT	16
Bengkulu	5	Papua	6
Lampung	6	West Papua	2
West Kalimantan	8	Total: 341	

As seen in Table 1, the number of special school funded by the state is 341 which is far below the required number as there is no data base to review the efficacy of the available special school. To overcome the problem due to limited access of children with special need to get proper education facilities, inclusion is an option. Inclusion became widespread in Indonesia for the last five years. It was started with the Ministry regulation no.70 in 2009 on inclusive education. So far there are 814 inclusive schools responding to the new regulation (Solider, 2013).

Similar to those practiced in other countries such as US and Australia, Indonesian children with mild disabilities can join the regular classroom activities for wither part or all of the school day. However, not all schools are ready to implement inclusion. In this case, the number of inclusive school is regulated by the governor. As an example in Jakarta, based on Pergub no 116 in 2007 it is stated that in each district at least three inclusive kindergarten, three primary school, three junior high school and three senior high school. In fact, Jakarta has 44 districts which are equal to 132 inclusive schools for each education level, while the total number of inclusive school ranges 15 to 44 schools throughout the province, not each district (Solider, 2013). It means that the available

inclusive school in Jakarta is one third of the regulated standard. It describes the fewer education opportunity for children with special need in big cities, let alone those living in remote areas.

Based on a research evaluating the inclusive education at primary and secondary schools in Indonesia, it is reported that there are several problems found. The effectiveness of the inclusive program only occurs in primary education, while in junior high school there is no model of ideal inclusion (Dyah, 2008). The method is integrating students with special need to regular classes without certain treatment or curriculum. In this case, it is significant to distinguish between inclusion and integration. The first is well planned by considering a lot of aspects to support the special need children, whereas the later concerns with allowing the child to join the whole learning activities without specialized program.

In Indonesia, not all children with special need are lucky to get the education as well as religious teaching. Especially those with severe disabilities or more than one defect, for instance ASD and blindness. Even state special school ask parents to treat the child's disorder that may hinder the learning process as the school cannot provide the therapy needed. It shows that there is limited number of teachers with the competence to teach children with special needs. Therefore the children who cannot afford to go to special school can choose homeschooling.

Homeschooling becomes an option. Nevertheless, applying homeschooling brings another consequence, namely the readiness to set the curriculum especially when it also involves religious education. In this case, many educators tend to see the difference or disability of the student, rather than the student's ability to learn and actively participate in classroom activities. This type of teachers cannot see the valuable contribution to classroom diversity. Therefore, having competent teacher to assist the homeschooling program is also not an easy task to do.

Today, inclusive education is promoted everywhere. In this type of schooling, the child must be prepared to face the diverse class. Not only challenging the child, implementing inclusive education is a big challenge for teachers. Teachers will be responsible for the teaching and learning process of the diverse class. Classroom diversity results in several consequences such as more teaching preparation, various techniques and effective assessment method (Stainback, 2009). It requires teacher's competence and experience to understand the individual needs and abilities of children with special needs. The challenge is abundant when it is related to the issue religious teaching. Introducing religion, particularly the basic concept of Islam, is a huge project as it needs careful plan as it involves special children.

B. INTRODUCING ISLAM

Introducing Islam and any other abstract concept is a challenge for careful planning of instruction. Children with special need such as autism spectrum find it difficult to understand the abstract concepts. They tend to perceive everything literally. While, religious teaching often include symbolic relationship that is not concrete and easy to

grasp (Rain, 2008). However, this does not mean that it is impossible to introduce Islam to children with special need. In this paper, the example of this issue is related to those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a disorder caused by neurological abnormalities or brain dysfunction causing deficit in social skill. It comprises difficulties in sharing attention with others to the same task at hand, not displaying empathy, and seemingly not understanding emotions displayed by other persons (Lord, 1993 in Reynold & Fletcher-Johnson, 2007). In summary, the child with ASD is not geared into the patterns of interaction which are the vehicle that brings children into the already organized social world. Due to their limitation in social skill, ASD children needs special teaching strategies.

There are various teaching strategies for ASD children as verbal learners. Yet, in regular teaching strategies, the materials provided for visual learners are still limited. It involves visual representations of the abstract ideas. Furthermore, Boyle (2005) suggest at least four basic strategies to teach children with ASD, namely consistent structure, visual aids representing abstract ideas, reliance on literal interpretations of religious concepts and using familiar images to teach basic theories.

Introducing Islam to children with special needs require some planning particularly on the material selection. These children think in concrete and literal ways. Therefore, the material should be arranged within their range of cognition. In an inclusive playgroup at Yogyakarta, the materials cover simple and basic practice in Islam such as the daily doa, hijaiyah and moral values. They are given through playing, teacher modeling and demonstrating, singing and making some creation. However, it is reported that the strategies to handle the special need children are still not effective (Rusmanudin, 2012).

In inclusive primary school, the Islamic education curriculum is modified by lessening the standard for the special need students. The strategies and learning aids are also similar to regular students but with more visual support. However, the students with mild disability have been able to fulfill the required the minimum standard of competence (Rifngati, 2014). In other inclusive primary school, the material is modified and the learning space is given at various classes such remedial class, pre-classical class, special class, and regular class (Hidayatulloh, 2015).

To introduce Islam, the teaching involves careful planning. An ideal teacher of religious education should involve families in planning a program to reach the expected learning outcomes. Families especially parents are the experts in knowing what works, what motivates and what triggers their child. Family involvement is helpful to address things like attention span, motivational interests, perceptual difficulties, reading level, limitations to participation, strategies that work, child's unique strengths, ways to relate to the child and causes of behavior. It is important to note that without family input, the planned programs that seem creative become ineffective because it may fail to identify and meet the needs of the individual child (NCPD, 2013).

C. HOW TO TEACH VISUAL LEARNERS

Children with ASD and several other type of special need are commonly visual spatial learners. Their learning style is characterized by observing people or events, scanning everything into its detail specification especially to interesting matters for them and enjoying visual stimulation. They would enjoy maps, pictures, diagrams, and color. To fully understand something, these children need to see the teacher's body language/ facial expression and not pleased with lectures or long speech with complex language. To recall mental wandering, they even can relate it with specific word, sound or certain smell. One of their strengths is to think in pictures and learn best from visual displays (Learning style, 2005).

Not only spatial learning, most of them also learn best through tactile strategies such as to touch, handle, manipulate materials and objects. These children are good at using appliances and tools. They find it hard to sit still for long periods and become easily distracted by their need for activity and exploration. Visual spatial learners can work best when the condition supports their ability. This characteristic brings positive traits such as excellent visualizer, continually build permanent framework of ideas, are highly imaginative and creative and so forth. However, at the same, the specialties also results in several more negative traits such as may find it hard to move from one topic to another, easily irritated by environment, weak in rote memorization and still many other possible weakness (Lohman, 1994). These characteristics require learning condition where their strengths are facilitated, not limited. Unfortunately, it brings the consequence that teachers should prepare more visual aid and multimedia to support the learning which takes more effort and commitment to teach their best.

To create visual aid and support the class by multimedia, teachers of religious education can make use of technology leading to three main objectives. *First*, to enable the augment of teaching and learning process for children with special need as technology cater for different learning. In addition, teachers can share with education practitioners through technology such as social media so that they can update their teaching strategies. *Second*, the use of technology improves administration and planning an effective course for children with special need. It covers learning and teaching reusing and adapting documents as well as accessing or sharing information to enhance teacher's personal knowledge. Through technology, teachers are not only enlarging the knowledge on religious education but also their understanding of professional issues around the education for children with special need. *Third*, it is helpful to improve assessment and

reporting by recording learner achievement, tracking pupil progress and using the information in assessment for learning (Becta, 2010).

The following is an example of the sequence of topic to introduce Islam to a visual learner from 4 to 10 years old. These topics are considered as the first topic to introduce Islam to children with ASD.

Table 2. First Topics to Introduce Islam to ASD children

No.	Topics	Duration	Strategies
1.	Folklore on good deeds	4	Listening stories with illustration and short phrases
2.	The movement in Wudlu'	4	Imitation with prompt
3.	The movement in Sholat	4	Imitation with prompt
4.	Al-Fatihah	5 or 6	Scaffold per-ayah
5.	Do'a before and after meals	5	Imitation with prompt
6.	Do'a for parents	5 or 6	Imitation with prompt, using song
7.	Do'a before and after class	6	Imitation with prompt
8.	Do'a before sleeping	6	Imitation with prompt
9.	Hijaiyah	6 or 7	Linking dots to introduce some simple letters, using song
10.	Stating "Islam"	7	Verbalizing with prompt
11.	Stating "Allah"	7	Verbalizing with prompt
12.	Stating "Muhammad"	7	Verbalizing with prompt
13.	Stating "Al-Qur'an"	7 or 8	Verbalizing with prompt
14.	The manner of greeting	7	Utilizing social story (comic strip) on how to greet people
15.	The sequence of Wudlu'	7	Utilizing pecs given at random to be put in good order and label the movement
16.	Practicing Wudlu'	7	Independent practice of wudlu'
17.	Sujud	8	Imitation with prompt to recite well during sujud
18.	Ruku'	8	Imitation with prompt to recite well during ruku'
19.	I'tidal	8 or 9	Imitation with prompt to recite well during i'tidal
20.	The sequence of Sholat	7	Utilizing pecs given at random to be put in good order and label the movement
21.	Practicing Sholat'	8 or 9	Independent practice of sholat
22.	The manner in the mosque	9	Utilizing social story on do(s) and don't(s) in the mosque
23.	Short surahs (Al-Ikhlash, An-Nas)	9	Imitation with prompt
24.	The order of Hijaiya	10	Putting randomized letter of hijaiyah into correct order
25.	Self-regulation	10	Utilizing social story on how to prepare for sholat and do the prayers independently

In the sequence of topic to introduce to ASD children above, the teaching strategies have involved the consistent structure as each concept is given through scaffolding. It shows consistent structure that consists of prompting--patterning--labeling--applying.

As an example in introducing the sequence of wudhu which is started with prompting the movement, patterning the sequence and label the order, followed by applying regularly. The visual aids representing abstract ideas are used in introducing the good deeds, how to do sholat and how to apply religious concept in everyday living. The strategies also rely on literal interpretations of religious concepts such as familiarizing with the statements to express faith such Islam, Allah, Muhammad and Al-Qur'an. In addition, it also uses familiar images to teach theories through social stories. These are in line with the suggested basic strategies to teach children with ASD as proposed by Boyle (2005).

To support the visual learning, the following are some suggested links covering the pictures that are suitable for kids, colorful and easy to understand comic strip to teach about social life and the dictionary that is more understandable than mere phrases.

<http://pdictionary.com/>
<http://www.kidaccess.com/html/catalog/main.html>
<http://visual.merriam-webster.com/>
<http://www.eflnet.com/vocab/index.php>
http://elt.heinle.com/cgitelt/course_products_wp.pl?fid=M2b&product_isbn_issn=1413022561&subject_code=DIC01&discipline_number=301
<http://www.esolhelp.com/online-picture-dictionary.html>
http://www.esl.net/oxford_picture_dictionary.html
<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/books/picturedictionaries>
http://www.thegraycenter.org/social_stories.htm

The above links are the tools to enrich the materials for all purposes including religious teaching. The materials are arranged in such a way to support the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). IEP is essentially a detailed document that fully specifies the strategy for the ASD child's education, particularly when parents decide to introduce Islam as early as possible. It is also completed with the academic goals and the measures to evaluate (Robledo & Ham Kucharski, 2008).

The existence of IEP characterizes the difference of education treatment between children with special need and those who can attend regular classical teaching. In formulating IEP, parents take control while teachers and school officials participate in its process. In this detail document, nearly every single aspect of the child's instruction will be spelled out down to how many hours of learning is required. It's similar to contract negotiation between parents and education administrators. Parents have the right to make changes prior to signing the IEP. This is because parents are responsible in monitoring the progress. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that teachers and administrators are also experts in the field, especially if they specialize in educating children with special need or ASD children. The detail of IEP and expertise of teachers

become the reasons so that in Indonesia until today not all parents trust special school better than inclusive school.

IEP is not only applied at schools but also in homeschooling. Homeschooling is a viable alternative for teaching religion to ASD child. It much depends in the child's abilities and skills. It is suitable to severely autistic child that will benefit most from one-on-one sessions at home. Yet, experts say that for most ASD children who have been diagnosed as moderate or high-functioning, homeschooling may be a disservice (Robledo & Ham-Kucharski, 2008). This argument stems from the belief that children with ASD do not have any problem on cognition, but they have lots of trouble in social arena. Accordingly, they need chances to build their social skill and to begin interacting with others. Instead of keeping them at home which could suffer from isolation, it is strongly suggested that they practice socializing with their peers. In the context of introducing Islam, ASD children will get benefit by learning with their peers.

In many ways, nonetheless, homeschooling can be a good option. If through the process parents realized that the inclusive education is inadequate or inappropriate for the child, parents trust more on homeschooling. Similarly, if parent's attempt to inclusive school and they are rejected but unable to pay for tuition fee for special school, homeschooling is the best solution.

Deciding to have homeschooling brings big consequences. Parents should plan to include enrichment activities to fill up the schedule, to give the child's opportunity to meet and interact with peers. In this case, to introduce Islam in context, it also needs the involvement of the whole family. All family members can take part in implementing the religious instruction as the model. The involvement is planned in such a way to come to the learning outcomes as planned in the IEP.

Despite the complexities of introducing Islam to ASD children, the key factor is on parental guidance. Parents take the dominant role in leading, directing and monitoring the process of their child's religious education. The development of their child depends on the acceptance, communication quality and support of parents (Farihah, 2001). However, more support is needed so that parents are aware that they are responsible for introducing Islam to their children despite their difficulties and differences in need and abilities.

D. CONCLUSION

Implementing religious instruction especially to introduce Islam to children with special need, is possible to do. Despite the complexities of the education facilities for these children, careful planning program becomes the key for their learning success. What they need is a good corporation between parents and education practitioners such as teachers, school officials, education administrators and therapists. In this case, it is significant to highlight that the responsibility is not laid on parents only. It requires the support from families, society, and education authorities.

What is needed now is teacher's competence and experience to understand child's individual needs and abilities. The children especially those with autistic spectrum

disorder demand for careful teaching preparation, various techniques and effective assessment method. There some alternatives to handle the religious education for children with special need by referring to their special way of learning. This is because they are not merely disable, but they have special feature requiring special condition to encourage their learning success. The condition covers the strategies such as consistent structure, visual aids representing abstract ideas, reliance on literal interpretations of religious concepts and using familiar images to introduce Islam. These strategies are matched with their learning characteristics as visual spatial learners.

To optimize their learning in Islam, more parties are invited. Today there is still no regulation from Ministry of Religious Education to implement inclusive education in madrasahs at primary and secondary levels, inclusive ma'had or Islamic boarding school, inclusive Islamic universities and Islamic special school. It is a good start to begin with constructing data base to figure out the number of the special need children who need Islamic teaching. With more hands helping parents to handle their special child, better education opportunities will brighten their future.

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