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An Evaluation of Social Stories That Can Be Used in the Religious Education and Training Process of Individuals with Autism: An Example of Activity

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ABSTRACT

Autism is a disorder that can be encountered frequently all over the world; It is defined as a developmental disorder that continues throughout life and is characterized as the inability of a person to establish emotional or mental relationships with their social environment, and a state of alienation and detachment from society. In this study, an evaluation was made regarding the learning processes of individuals with "Autistic Spectrum Disorder" and how the elements (knowledge, skills and values) within the scope of religious education can be acquired through "Social Stories" and examples of activities regarding social stories in religious education were given. Social stories are frequently used in the education-training process for these individuals. It was aimed to use this learning method in religious education as well. In the study, the document review method, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was used and descriptive analysis and content analysis were preferred in its analysis. In the study, how the knowledge, skills and achievements included in the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Course Curriculum can be realized by using social stories in the education-training process of individuals with autism, how the education-training process should be, the use of social stories in the religious education process and sample applications were included.

Keywords: Religious Education, Autism, Program, Social Stories, Education.

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Otizimli Bireylerin Din Eğitimi ve Öğretimi Sürecinde Kullanılabilecek Sosyal Öykülere Yönelik Bir Değerlendirme: Etkinlik Örneği

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ÖZET

MAKALE BİLGİSİ

Otizm dünya genelinde sıklıkla rastlanılabilecek bir rahatsızlık olup; kişinin sosyal çevresiyle duygusal veya zihinsel açıdan ilişki kuramaması, toplumdan uzaklaşma ve kopma durumu olarak nitelendirilen ve hayat boyu devam eden gelişimsel bir bozukluk olarak ifade edilmektedir. Bu çalışmada, “Otizmlili Spektrum Bozukluğu” olan bireylerdeki öğrenme süreçlerine ve din eğitimi kapsamındaki unsurların (bilgi, beceri ve değerlerin) “Sosyal Öyküler” aracılığı ile nasıl kazandırılacağına yönelik bir değerlendirme yapılmıştır ve din eğitiminde sosyal öykülere yönelik etkinlik örnekleri verilmiştir. Bu bireylere yönelik eğitim-öğretim sürecinde sosyal öyküler sıklıkla kullanılmaktadır. Bu öğrenme yönteminin din eğitiminde de kullanılması amaçlanmıştır. Araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden birisi olan doküman inceleme yöntemi kullanılmış, analiz edilmesinde ise betimsel analiz ve içerik analizi tercih edilmiştir. Çalışmada, Otizmlili bireylerin eğitim-öğretim sürecinde sosyal öykülerden yararlanarak Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programı’nda yer alan bilgi, beceri ve kazanımların nasıl gerçekleştirilebileceği, eğitim öğretim süreci nasıl olması gerektiği, din eğitimi sürecinde sosyal öykülerin kullanımı ve örnek uygulamalara yer verilmiştir.

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Introduction

Religious education appears as a process integrated into educational curricula starting from primary school, particularly within the framework of the "Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge" course. This process aims to impart and develop the knowledge, skills, and values that individuals need in their personal lives, professional careers, and social interactions. Religious education focuses on teaching content that individuals may encounter, implement, or apply in real-life situations, and it contributes to the formation of a peaceful lifestyle in terms of physical health, mental well-being, and socio-cultural balance. In his work *An Introduction to the Science of Religious Education*, Cemal Tosun emphasizes the importance of this process being meaningful and relevant to individuals lived experiences, highlighting the necessity and desire for such relevance (Tosun, 2021). In a circular issued by the Ministry of National Education on November 7, 1950 (No. 2949), the following statement was included: “...It has been deemed appropriate to introduce religious instruction in primary

schools and to include these courses among the other subjects in order to meet the religious needs of Turkish children, just as their other needs are met.” With this statement, the inclusion of religious education in the national curriculum was officially requested (MEB Tebliğler Dergisi, 1950).

From an academic standpoint, systematic studies in the field of religious education formally began in 1980 with the establishment of the Department of Religious Education at the Faculty of Theology, Ankara University. Since then, such efforts have steadily increased, and religious education has been integrated into school curricula as a compulsory subject at the primary, middle, and secondary school levels. These religious education courses are implemented within the framework of the Ministry of National Education’s Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Curriculum (RCMK).

The curriculum is designed to include complementary and supportive knowledge, skills, and learning outcomes across all educational levels. It is also structured to be developmentally appropriate for students in primary, middle, and high school, considering their physical and psychological characteristics at each stage, and supporting their transition to subsequent levels of education. The curriculum outcomes and explanations are kept up to date and are designed to be relatable to real life. The most recent revision of the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Curriculum was carried out in 2018 (DKAB, 2018).

Individuals with autism often face difficulties in understanding social situations and determining how to behave appropriately within these contexts in their daily lives. To support individuals with autism in interpreting social scenarios and responding to them appropriately, social stories were developed by Carol Gray, a special education teacher (Olçay Gül & İftar, 2022).

There are debates in the literature regarding religious education for individuals with autism. These debates center on whether individuals with autism are religiously responsible or not (Walsh et al., 2011). While these discussions do not involve a religious evaluation, they often focus on the attitudes of educators, families, and religious education instructors. Therefore, this study examines this existing debate in the literature within its pedagogical context, aiming to shed light on perceptions and approaches to the teaching process. Religious education does not aim to impose any obligations on individuals with special needs. It aims to help individuals with special needs adapt to social life, make sense of their environment, and strengthen their value orientations. The Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Curriculum encompass fundamental developmental areas such as cognitive awareness, relating concrete concepts to daily life, reflecting moral values in behavior, and strengthening social communication skills. In this context, the need to address religious education for individuals with autism within a pedagogical framework influenced the shaping of the study's findings.

Social stories are short, clear narratives written about common social situations encountered in daily life. Due to their simple and easily understandable structure, they are used to teach specific behaviors, positively reinforce existing appropriate behaviors, and acknowledge or praise individuals for their actions. Social stories are composed of four types of sentences: descriptive sentences, directive sentences, perspective sentences, and affirmative sentences. The structure and content of a social story are shaped within the framework of these sentence types (Özdemir, 2007). In the process of writing social stories, it is essential to construct sentences that clearly answer the questions of who, what, where, when, and how in relation to a social situation that the individual is likely to encounter in daily life. The language used is a critical factor, and words that convey absolute certainty are deliberately avoided. Additionally, the story should have a title that aligns with the topic being addressed, consist entirely of positive statements, and be written from a third-person perspective. Social stories can also be supported with visual aids. It has been observed that social stories

accompanied by visuals are more effective in promoting the acquisition of targeted behaviors. However, careful attention must be paid to the use of visuals. The colors and symbols used should not overshadow the intended message of the story, the visuals should not be overly complex, and they must be consistent with the content of the story.

Social stories can be read to the child in a calm environment that allows for focus, or they can be given to the child to read independently if the child is of a reading age. In both cases, the primary objective is to ensure that the child comprehends the content of the story (Özdemir, 2007). An example of a social story is as follows:

“Listening to a Story Quietly”

- Sometimes, our teacher reads us a story during Turkish class at school. (Descriptive sentence)
- Most of my classmates enjoy listening to stories. (Perspective sentence)
- When my teacher reads a story, I will sit and try to listen quietly. (Directive sentence)
- Listening to a story quietly is a good behavior. (Affirmative sentence)

Studies have evaluated the process of teaching social skills to individuals with autism and emphasized the importance of directly conveying information about social situations to the child. In the context of educational practice, the information and questions presented to the individual should be delivered using positive directives, in a clear and comprehensible manner (Özdemir, 2007).

Autism, as a developmental disability, is characterized by social withdrawal, disconnection from society, difficulties in communication with others, and challenges in understanding emotional states (Danış, 2001). Since autism was first identified in 1944, the increasing prevalence of the condition has been accompanied by a corresponding rise in research and practical applications related to autism. Within this body of research, there has been a growing focus on exploring specialized methods and practices for delivering religious education to individuals with autism, with the aim of ensuring that such education is both appropriate and beneficial for this population.

Alongside these efforts, various debates have emerged concerning the provision of religious education to individuals with autism. Some perspectives argue that individuals with autism are not religiously accountable, and that abstract religious concepts—particularly communal forms of worship are difficult, if not impossible, to teach to them. However, recent studies and educational practices targeting individuals with autism have demonstrated the positive impact of religion’s therapeutic aspects. Among the most significant factors contributing to this effect is the concept of prayer, which holds a central role in religious education. Research findings, including interviews with individuals with autism, indicate that prayer is frequently chosen and practiced by these individuals. Moreover, teachers involved in religious education for individuals with autism report that prayer, compared to other religious topics, is relatively easier to teach. Individuals with autism have expressed that engaging in prayer helps them feel better and provides emotional support, particularly in terms of accepting their personal experiences and challenges (Bilecik, 2019).

In character and values education for individuals with autism, teachers simplifying materials, ensuring two-way communication, and consistently applying the teaching method positively support the learning processes of individuals with autism (Kistoro et al., 2021). Individuals with autism have been observed to exhibit weaker tendencies to name supernatural situations related to religion. However, clinicians and professionals working with individuals with autism emphasize that their enhanced sensory processing, systematization

tendencies, and unique cognitive profiles can be supported in addressing religious issues (Kéri, 2023).

There are research findings indicating that religious education is beneficial in situations requiring social interaction, where individuals with autism may struggle, as well as in communication with others. The presence of religion's influence across all areas of social life, the incorporation of religious education into various aspects of human relationships and social life, and its aim to teach content that individuals are likely to encounter in real life, all make religious education essential for all individuals. This has been highlighted by researchers as an important factor in the development of social and individual relationships in educational practices for individuals with autism. Religious education for individuals with autism has been described as a necessary area of education that helps them make sense of behaviors and practices they may struggle to understand in daily life, while also teaching social behaviors and skills. Within this framework, in 2010, the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge course was included in the curricula for individuals with autism, and religious education for individuals with autism began to be implemented (Bilecik, 2019).

Social stories are a widely used application in the education of individuals with autism, particularly in the teaching of skills and behaviors. Due to their simple and straightforward structure, these stories are easily understood and play a significant role in directly teaching the targeted skills. Since social stories are prepared in alignment with the program's learning outcomes, they aim to achieve the objectives of the program and provide convenience for teachers. It is believed that social stories can also be effectively used in religious education, facilitating the understanding and learning of religious topics by individuals with autism. In this context, based on the fundamental goal of how social stories can be used in religious education for individuals with autism, the following questions will be addressed:

1. How should the educational process for individuals with autism be structured in religious education?
2. How should social stories be utilized in the religious education process for individuals with autism?
3. How can example social stories be developed for use in religious education for individuals with autism?

1. Method

The research was conducted using qualitative research methods. The data for the study were collected through document analysis. The sample of the study was a convenience sample. The preference for a convenience sample was influenced by its potential to facilitate a more detailed exploration of the research topic in future studies, as well as being a time- and cost-efficient approach. In this context, documents and materials were examined that reflect the attitudes of individuals with autism spectrum disorder toward religion and religious education, the concept of social stories, and the use of social stories in the education of individuals with autism (Binnetoğlu & Tarhan, 2024). Additionally, the impact of religious education on the lives of individuals with autism, as well as the views of both individuals with autism and teachers providing religious education, were explored. Furthermore, in accordance with the scope of the study, the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Curriculum was examined to identify which learning outcomes in the curriculum facilitate the use of social stories (Binnetoğlu & Tarhan, 2025)

1.1. Study Group

The study group of the research consists of individuals with autism spectrum disorder

attending primary and secondary school levels, as well as teachers who provide Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge education to individuals with autism. The documents examined in the study include the views of individuals with autism regarding religion and religious education, as well as teacher opinions on the impact of religious education on individuals with autism. In this way, the study ensures the inclusion of both individuals with autism and the teachers who educate them.

1.2. Data Collection and Analysis

In the research, document/record review was used as the data collection tool. In line with the selected method, documents related to the educational process of individuals with autism, documents concerning the concept and use of social stories, and documents regarding religious education for individuals with autism and the use of social stories in religious education were examined, and research findings were obtained. In the evaluation of the information gathered through document/record review, descriptive analysis and content analysis, which are qualitative data analysis methods, were used. The first of these methods, descriptive analysis, allows for direct quotations, ensuring that the data obtained during the research process is presented as a significant element of the study. Thus, the information obtained within the scope of the research topic is summarized and presented to the reader in line with the researcher interpretations.

The other data analysis method, content analysis, provides a more comprehensive examination of the data that has been summarized through descriptive analysis, and presents the concepts that explain the data to the reader. Due to this feature, content analysis is chosen as a method for topics that are not directly measurable. In this context, during the research process, descriptive analysis was preferred for classifying data related to the use of social stories with individuals with autism and the use of social stories in religious education for individuals with autism, while content analysis was chosen for the detailed examination and evaluation of the documents obtained related to the research topic.

The documents to be used as sources in the research were deemed important for their appropriateness in terms of content, and documents related to these topics were examined. Considering their scientific validity, articles published in peer-reviewed journals, master's and doctoral theses, official programs, and Ministry of National Education publications were selected. Open-access, verifiable, and documents prepared with an up-to-date pedagogical approach were preferred. During the analysis, the use of social stories in the religious education of individuals with autism was evaluated from a pedagogical perspective, and the research findings were interpreted.

1.3. Limitations

The research was based solely on document analysis, which constitutes its fundamental limitation. The study focused solely on individuals with autism and religious education for these individuals. Various types of documents were sought, but due to accessibility, certain types of sources were accessed (thesis, article, etc.). The content analysis method is interpretative, allowing for the extraction of somewhat different themes from similar sources. The Religious Culture and Education (RCA) program and special education policies are subject to change over time; therefore, the findings are limited to the current curriculum context. The number of social story examples included in the study is limited. Using different social stories or increasing the number of stories could diversify the research results.

2. Findings

As a result of the examination and evaluation of the information contained in the

documents obtained in the study, the findings have been categorized under the following headings: "Findings related to the educational process of individuals with autism in religious education," "The use of social stories in the religious education process for individuals with autism," and "Examples/Recommendations for social stories that can be used in religious education for individuals with autism."

2. 1. Findings on the Evaluation of the Educational Process of Individuals with Autism in Religious Education

Religious education is a type of education necessary for every individual in society, and everyone has the right to receive religious education. The Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge curricula have been prepared with this necessity in mind, and they are designed according to the levels and learning conditions of the students. In addition to the curricula for all levels where Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge is taught, separate curricula exist for Imam Hatip middle schools and high schools. Furthermore, independent programs have been developed for special education schools, with the content and outcomes of the lessons structured in a way that students can easily understand and grasp. The education of individuals with autism is a process that requires attention and care. Religious education, which often involves abstract topics and concepts, must also be conducted with the same attention and care. While the topics and learning outcomes in the curriculum include various abstract concepts, many religious rituals and practices are carried out in congregational settings. Individuals with autism may face more difficulties than neurotypical individuals in understanding abstract concepts, and they may struggle to make sense of and participate in communal worship. For this reason, some special education teachers and research on children with autism have raised arguments that providing religious education to individuals with autism may be meaningless and unnecessary. Those who support this view argue that individuals with autism do not have any religious obligations and cannot develop a sense of belief or religious consciousness (Bilecik, 2019).

For individuals with autism, concretization is crucial in the process of making sense of what is presented to them. An examination of documents on religious education for individuals with autism indicates that individuals with autism have difficulty understanding abstract concepts. The use of concrete objects and visually supported explanations have been suggested to overcome this problem.

In contrast to the views that argue religious education is meaningless for individuals with autism, there are also researchers and special education teachers who argue that it is an essential necessity for individuals with autism and that its therapeutic effects have been observed. When examining studies conducted with individuals with autism, findings indicate that, contrary to those who consider religious education unnecessary, these individuals possess belief in God and religion, find that praying and engaging in worship benefit them, and approach the situations they encounter with a more positive perspective because of this education. These findings are among the noteworthy results of the research (Bilecik, 2019).

Another argument presented by researchers opposing religious education for children with autism is that individuals with autism will not be able to adapt to the social environments (such as mosques, madrasas, etc.) where religious rituals and activities take place, and that they will be unable to adjust to the environment and exhibit appropriate behaviors. It is argued that when individuals with autism fail to demonstrate appropriate behavior in such environments, they may receive negative reactions from others in the setting, which could lead to their exclusion from these environments. However, in studies conducted by researchers, the views and opinions of special education teachers have been included, and in contrast to this view, it has been stated that religious education for individuals with autism

contributes to children's socialization, particularly in terms of social acceptance. It has been emphasized that any information, skill, or behavior learned in religious education, or the careful and attentive practice of the rituals of a religious act, facilitates acceptance by others in the environment (Bilecik, 2019). The reviewed sources indicate that direct demonstrations of behavior are effective for individuals with autism. For example, it is emphasized that behaviors related to greeting, entering a mosque, and cleanliness should be taught through modeling.

In addition to all the positive effects of religious education on individuals, the moral values and behavioral education included in the curriculum of the teaching process can also have the same positive impact on the child's daily life. For example, the knowledge, skills, and behaviors related to "Religion and Cleanliness" are largely directed toward daily life and life events that the child frequently encounters. Within this learning area, behaviors such as washing hands, brushing teeth, and keeping the environment clean are taught while also ensuring that the religious dimension and its importance are understood. Learning areas like this aim to impart self-care skills to the child, along with religious values. The knowledge or behavior related to cleanliness that the child learns in this lesson is directly relevant to situations they will encounter and use in daily life. The child can easily integrate and apply the information, skills, and values learned in the lesson into their life. Therefore, religious education is a necessary form of education for children with autism, just as it is for other types of education, and it clearly has a facilitative effect on the child's individual and social life.

Religious education for individuals with autism, as previously mentioned, is a process that requires care. One of the important factors to consider in this process is the level of autism. While religious education can be more easily provided for individuals with mild levels of autism, it becomes more challenging for those with severe levels of autism. In such cases, the content of religious education needs to focus more on simple topics found in daily life, rather than information and skills. In this direction, religious education programs or processes should be planned in a flexible structure that can be individualized according to the level of autism. With contents prepared accordingly, the individual's learning process can be accelerated, the acquisition of the targeted knowledge, skills, and behaviors can be facilitated, and the goals of the program can be achieved more quickly (Okumuşlar, 2006). On the other hand, knowing the individual's level of autism and acting accordingly provides ease for the teachers who provide religious education. While applying a single program to children with different autism levels may be easy for those with mild autism, it can become challenging for those with moderate or severe autism. Implementing educational processes with programs and contents that can be adjusted according to the level of autism can also be beneficial for the teachers who provide the education. In this way, not only can the success rate of the education be increased, but the efficiency of the educational process can also be improved (Cebeci & Yenen, 2022).

The learning duration of children with autism is a factor that differs from other children. This aspect emerges as another point of focus in the process of religious education. The learning duration can vary depending on the targeted knowledge, skills, and behaviors. Repeating an activity or practice multiple times and doing it together with the child, as well as renewing the repetitions at specific intervals to ensure the activity is fully and correctly understood, are factors that slow down the process. Therefore, these aspects should be considered when preparing activities for the educational process (Uyanık & Sarı, 2021). For the learning process to be efficient, activities must be tailored to the levels of the individuals to help children make sense of the time they are in. Furthermore, the activity and all its steps must be demonstrated to the child. The activities should be positioned in an accessible place in front of the child as much as possible, and the process of the activity, as well as the

application steps, should be supported by writing and visuals. The activity sheets should be kept ready on the child's desk. This way, the child can see the activity as a whole and follow the steps involved. This type of activity application accelerates the child's learning process and ensures that learning becomes more permanent. By supporting the learning process in this way with activities and applications, it also contributes to the quicker achievement of the target behaviors and gains.

Another important aspect to consider in the learning process of religious education for individuals with autism is the use of supportive materials and tools. In interviews with special education teachers who provide education to individuals with autism, it has been observed that teachers complain about the lack of educational tools and materials. Teachers particularly express dissatisfaction with the absence of visual materials, resources, and books that would assist in the lessons (Bilecik, 2019). It is a well-established fact that the use of materials, including visual elements that support activities aligned with the program's objectives, positively affects the learning process. The same holds true for religious education. Supporting the topic in the religious education process with a material that the child can easily access in daily life will have a positive impact on ensuring the permanence of the learned information. For example, when teaching the objective "The holy book of Islam is the Qur'an," using a Qur'an in the lesson and allowing the children to explore the Qur'an could help make this knowledge permanent and foster a positive interest in the Qur'an. Similarly, when teaching the objective "Describes the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)," using materials such as small activity sheets containing information about the Prophet Muhammad will also be effective in making the subject easier to learn and understand. When the documents obtained as sources are examined, the lack of special educational materials prepared or adapted for the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge course is frequently emphasized.

Throughout the entire educational process, the use of tools and materials in appropriate environments and conditions, along with explanations made through these materials, creates a positive impact on both students and teachers. It transforms the lesson from a routine activity into an enjoyable learning environment (Gebeloğlu, 2016). The tools and materials used in lessons play a supportive role in education. While they make the process more enjoyable and engaging for the students, they also facilitate the process for teachers and ensure that information is transmitted more effectively. In this context, the tools and materials used in the education of children with autism are of even greater importance. It is essential to ensure that the tools and materials do not cause the child to focus solely on one point or element, which could detract from their attention to the lesson. Special attention must be given to the colors, patterns, and elements used in these materials, to avoid distractions. If there are certain objects, colors, or situations that the child is fixated on, which could capture their attention and cause them to disconnect from the outside world, it is crucial to avoid using tools or materials that contain these elements. Otherwise, the child may focus entirely on the object of their interest, diverting their attention away from the main context of the lesson (Karaaslan & Kutlu, 2010). To prevent these issues, it is crucial for the individual receiving education to be well understood, and for the teacher to be thoroughly familiar with the individual's personal characteristics. The successful implementation of religious education for individuals with autism, enabling them to apply religious and moral values in their lives, requires the careful preparation and use of methods, techniques, and materials related to religious education. This should not be seen as a simplistic issue. If these factors are not considered and the necessary attention is not given, it will not be possible to achieve the desired success and effectiveness in religious education.

In the religious education process, attention should be paid to the elements to achieve

the desired outcomes (knowledge, skills, and values) in individuals with autism. Before the educational process begins, the child's autism level should be determined, the individual characteristics of the student should be understood, and the student must be well-known to the teacher. The educational process should proceed based on this information.

An important aspect of the educational process is the teacher's qualifications, both in the field of special education and in relation to the components of the program. A teacher's inadequacy in their field can affect the success of the program/education process and can lower the quality of education. Therefore, the teacher of religious education must be proficient in special education, the Religious Culture and Ethics Education Program, and have a thorough understanding of their students' autism levels, educational levels, and individual characteristics. For the education to be successful, the duration of the learning process should be well-adjusted, and the teacher should continuously observe which situations lead to quicker and more effective learning for the child. When the learning time is appropriately adjusted, acquiring knowledge, skills, and behaviors becomes easier. Additionally, the methods and techniques used in the learning process, as well as the use of tools and materials, should be integrated into the educational process. By considering these factors, it will be possible to observe an increase in the success rate of religious education in learning environments that support the learning process. Thus, children will be able to integrate what they learn in class into their lives more easily, their interest in and positive attitudes toward the lessons will increase, and the reinforcement of knowledge will be facilitated. The teacher's expertise in their field is also seen as an important factor in religious education for individuals with autism. A teacher who provides religious education must be proficient in both special education and religious education. Therefore, it is crucial that teacher candidates graduating from the Department of Religious Culture and Ethics Education (DKAB) and theology faculties have received adequate subject knowledge and teacher training during their undergraduate education. In this regard, the quality of the formation courses offered within theology faculties and the qualifications of the academic staff delivering these courses are also important factors. The competency and qualifications of the academic staff, along with the courses and practices offered, should be at a level that adequately prepares candidates for the teaching profession throughout their undergraduate education. Otherwise, it is a reality that teacher candidates who do not possess sufficient knowledge and experience in teaching, especially in the early years of their profession, will face difficulties when educating individuals with autism.

The teacher or teacher candidate must have adequate knowledge about the information, skills, and achievements included in the program and should be sufficiently competent in how these elements will be presented to students. If the teacher or teacher candidate is not proficient in their field (especially in the context of religious lessons), it may lead to undesirable situations during the educational process, both for themselves and for the students with autism in their classroom. Information on the learning areas included in the DKAB program for children with mild autism is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Learning Areas in the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge (RCMK) Program for Individuals with Autism

Some Major Religions in the World	Worship and Places of Worship in Islam
The Pillars of Islam and Articles of Faith	The Good Behaviors Advised by Islam
Allah (s.w.t.), Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) and the Qur'an	National and Spiritual Values

Expressions Used in Daily Life Regarding Islam	Our Social Duties in Islam
Cleanliness in Islam	Work Ethics in Islam

(See: Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Course Curriculum for Special Education Vocational Schools)

According to the information in Table 1, the learning areas mentioned include the acquisition of specific competencies and target behaviors. Many of these target behaviors belong to the cognitive domain. However, there are also target behaviors related to the affective and psychomotor domains. The curriculum includes not only the target behaviors but also the methods and techniques to be used in the religious education process. Methods and techniques that can be used during the education and teaching process for individuals with autism include “Direct Instruction, Errorless Teaching Methods, Question-Answer, Video Modeling, Drama, Social Stories, Simultaneous Prompting, and Fixed Waiting Time Teaching.” Individual or group activities can be applied to support these teaching methods, and the instruction can be reinforced. In the relevant study, one of these techniques, “Social Stories,” has been chosen to achieve the targeted knowledge, skills, and values. In conclusion, when the data obtained from the documents obtained during the research process are examined, the use of social stories for individuals with autism is compatible with the religious education process. The use of social stories facilitates the teaching of value-based learning outcomes, such as greetings, the mosque environment, teaching Surahs and prayers, cleanliness, sharing, and cooperation, which are particularly relevant in the Religious Culture and Awareness (RCAB) objectives. The simple and clear structure of social stories clearly demonstrates why and how these topics should be addressed. Furthermore, repeating social stories can have a positive impact on behavior.

2. 2. Findings Regarding the Use of Social Stories in the Religious Education Process for Individuals with Autism

Social stories, which lead to positive changes in the acquisition of target behaviors and skills, are used in the education of individuals with autism. Social stories are short narratives that contain behavioral cues regarding situations individuals may encounter in their social lives and daily activities. These stories answer the questions “who, what, where, when, and why” related to the social situations they contain. Social stories are also used to help individuals make changes in their existing routines, explain the reasons behind human behaviors, and in teaching information and skills as well as social situations (Karaaslan & Kutlu, 2010).

Social stories are used to achieve the goals related to the topics and achievements in the program, focusing on situations that individuals may encounter in their daily and social lives. In this context, the teacher can read the social story written about the topics the child witnesses in social life, ask the student to read it, or even act out the story in a dialogue form. Social stories used with individuals with autism who can read and write often appear as a structure that allows the individual to read it by themselves or read it to their friends. When the individual with autism reads the story repeatedly (or reads it to their friends), they tend to understand it better and can grasp the social situation or behavior addressed in the story more effectively (Çakmak, 2017).

Individuals with autism often struggle to understand the religious practices and behaviors they encounter in daily life and to comprehend their reasons. For instance, they

witness people praying, performing ablution, gathering in mosques, and using phrases such as “InshAllah,” “As-salamu alaykum,” and “May Allah have mercy on him.” However, they may experience confusion about when and why these expressions are used. To internalize and understand these behaviors and expressions, they need to comprehend the reasons behind them. Social stories that explain the reasons for these behaviors and how they are performed can help individuals not only understand the behavior but also acquire it as a skill. This is because social stories are designed to explain and teach social behaviors. Through the structure of sentences, the child can see the reason for a behavior and the circumstances under which people exhibit that behavior (Özdemir, 2007). Social stories, due to these characteristics, can be used as an effective element that facilitates the process of acquiring the targeted knowledge, skills, and values in the religious education process. Social stories prepared in line with the objectives of the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge (RCMK) curriculum can make religious lessons more efficient, make topics easier to understand, and help the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and behaviors more easily. The contents related to religious education are largely connected to social life. Therefore, they encompass many topics and behaviors that individuals may encounter in their social life. This is because religion and its elements have an undeniable influence in all social, cultural, and economic areas and hold a degree of authority in each of these fields. For this reason, using social stories that teach knowledge, skills, and values related to situations in social life will lead to highly productive outcomes in the religious education process. Through social stories, children’s interest and curiosity about religion, religious environments, and places where worship is performed can be awakened, and the content and delivery of the lesson can become more efficient for both the teacher and the student. When individuals internalize and learn any behavior or expression related to religion through social stories and begin to apply them in their own social lives, it will also contribute to the acceleration of the social acceptance process. Indeed, it has been demonstrated through research that a prayer learned through social stories in religious education lessons has a positive effect on the acceptance of the individual when recited in their social environment (Bilecik, 2019).

Thus, a significant momentum will be gained in achieving the objectives of religious education. Through social stories, individuals can gain knowledge about both worship and the places of worship (such as mosques and prayer halls), and appropriate environments and opportunities can be created for them to integrate with society by worshiping together with others in these places. When social stories written about mosques and prayer halls are especially supported with visuals, it can generate a special interest in such environments and provide sufficient information about these places. The child will recall that they often encounter this structure in daily life, seeing people constantly in this building, and through the social story, they can easily learn what it is used for and what people do there. For example, through social stories written about the “Worship and Places of Worship in Islam” learning area in the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge program, the child can become familiar with the concept of worship as well as the places of worship. This can make them want to visit these places and be there with others. Thus, through a social story written as part of the religious education process, while achieving the goals and outcomes of the religious lesson, it will also be possible to help the child acquire a habit they can apply in life, making it easier to communicate with others. On the other hand, writing social stories about abstract topics like “Belief in Allah” and using them in religious education lessons will make it easier for the teacher to explain and for the student to understand such abstract concepts.

Among the methods and techniques that can be used within the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge curriculum, social stories can be further integrated into the program and become a primary method. Additionally, they can be used as complementary and supporting

elements to other methods and techniques. For example, a social story written about the “Good Behaviors Advised by Islam” learning area can be used together with the drama technique. After reading the social story, the relevant topic can be dramatized using the drama technique. This way, the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and values will be supported, and they will be transformed into lasting behaviors.

Social stories facilitate the learning process for individuals with autism thanks to their concretization of abstract concepts and behavioral structure, as well as their concise, clear, and visually supported structures. The Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge course incorporates abstract, symbolic, and value-rich concepts, and these elements are compatible with social stories. For example, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) The achievements regarding the personality and character traits of Muhammad (3.3.1. *He says that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had a good moral character.* 3.3.2. *He says that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was brave and determined.* 3.3.3. *He says that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was hard-working.* 3.3.4. *He says that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) liked to help each other.* 3.3.5. *He says that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) loved nature and living things.* 3.3.6. *He says that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) valued people.*) are equipped with abstract concepts. It is possible to model values and character education for individuals with autism using the Prophet Muhammad. The abstract concepts in these learning outcomes need to be understood in their minds. Social stories transform the abstract into concrete and observable behaviors. Social stories are also highly effective in explaining emotions such as courage. Social stories also provide opportunities for modeling. It is possible to teach the information contained in the learning outcomes through modeling through social stories. The structure of social stories also allows for the use of visuals. Depending on the structure of the learning outcome, simple visuals related to the context of the topic can be added to the social story to strengthen the narrative. The outcomes related to religious expressions used in daily life included in the curriculum prepared for individuals with autism are (4.2.1. *Says the expression “Salamunaleykum” to people he/she meets.* 4.2.2. *Responds to someone who says “Salamunaleykum” by saying “Aleykumselam.”* 4.2.3. *Says the expression “Salamunaleykum” to people there when he/she enters an environment.* 4.4.2. *Is willing to greet people he/she meets.* 4.4.3. *Is willing to receive the greeting of someone who greets him/her.* 4.4.4. *Is willing to choose “Salamunaleykum” and “Aleykumselam.” when choosing greeting expressions.* 4.7.1. *Says that the expression “Maşallah” should be said to show that he/she likes it.* 4.7.2. *Says that the expression “Inshallah” should be said for a job to end well.*) are achievements related to social communication skills. Social communication skills are among the areas where social stories are frequently used by individuals with autism. The use of social stories plays a significant role in structuring discourse and behaviors in daily life. It is also one of the most effective methods for acquiring social response skills, a skill included in the learning outcomes. Individuals with autism often struggle to understand social-emotional responses. Social stories are a primary teaching method for explaining social-emotional situations, a skill included in the learning outcomes.

The Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge curriculum also includes outcomes related to routines. Social stories are a teaching method developed to teach social routines. Individuals with autism may have low social motivation when it comes to implementing routines. Explaining why something is done through social stories can have a positive effect on social motivation. The outcomes describing routines related to cleanliness in daily life (5.2.1. *Tells that one should keep their environment clean.* 5.2.2. *Tells that garbage should be thrown in the trash.* 5.2.3. *Tells that garbage (recyclable materials such as paper, cans, glass, batteries, oil) should be separated and disposed of.* 5.2.4. *Tells that the environment should be cleaned after activities such as picnics.* 5.3.1. *Cleans their environment willingly.* 5.3.2.

Enjoys cleaning their environment.) are aimed at behaviors that individuals with autism may observe in their environment. Social stories are the most effective teaching method for teaching routines, behaviors, and skills frequently encountered in daily life. Social stories support the internalization of behaviors that represent routines. Social stories are also used to teach skills using a cascading method. Explaining a behavior or skill in clear and concise steps facilitates learning. The responsibility for cleanliness, targeted in these learning outcomes, is also a social expectation placed on individuals. Using social stories supports this expectation by clearly and explicitly explaining it to the individual. Cleanliness-related behaviors are also directly observable. Social stories model these behaviors. Individuals with autism can feel anxious outdoors. Social stories, by explaining these expectations in advance, regulate behavior and alleviate potential anxiety.

2. 3. Findings on Examples of Social Stories for Individuals with Autism in Religious Education

Under this heading, an example of a social story prepared based on the components (learning areas, achievements, and topics) included in the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Special Education Teaching Program is discussed. Information regarding the activity process is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Example of a Social Story Prepared in Line with the Relevant Program

Activity Metadata					
Targeted Learning Type	Individual Characteristics	✓	Plan	Application	✓ Think
Activity Name	We Are Learning the Concepts and Expressions Used in Daily Life Regarding Islam.				
Activity Purpose	The aim is to teach target behaviors such as Bismillah, gratitude, prayer, greetings, the testimony of faith (Shahada), and the declaration of the oneness of God (Tawhid), which will enable individuals to learn expressions commonly used in daily life related to Islam.				
Duration	40 minutes.				
Learning Process	(Individual Work)		(Pair Work)		(Group Work)
Teaching Process	The teacher plays the role of a guide (moderator).				
Learning Outcome	Students make sense of the concepts and expressions used in daily life related to the Islamic religion and use these expressions in their own daily lives.				
Essential Tools and Materials	Social Story Cards				
Lesson	Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge				
Learning Area	Expressions Used in Daily Life Related to Islam				
Achievement	4.2.1 Says "Selamün Aleyküm" to people he/she encounters. 4.2.2 "Responds with "Aleyküm Selam" to someone who says "Selamün Aleyküm."				
	Cooperati- -on and	Discovery- Research	Discussion- Argumentation	Reflection	Problem Formulation

	Learning	Investigation			
Teaching Strategies, Methods, and Techniques	✓				
	Problem Solving	Metacognition	Demonstration and Practice	Brainstorming	Decision Making
	Entrepreneurial Words Technique	Futuristic Thinking Technique	Entrepreneurship Fair Technique	Entrepreneurial Letters Technique	Entrepreneurial Games Technique

Assessment Tools and Evaluation Instruments

	Checklist	Observation	Reflection	Worksheets	Survey
Evaluation Tools	✓	✓		✓	
	Individual (Self) Assessment	Peer Assessment	Group Assessment	Rubric (Graded Scoring Key)	Diagnostic Tree Diagram
	Concept Map	Mind Map	Word Association Test (WAT)	Structured Grid	Question Technique (True/False, Matching)

Activity Process

	Teacher's Role	Student's Role
Stimulating Curiosity	Prior to the commencement of the lesson, the teacher prepares social stories on designated topics and plans the approach for their presentation. The teacher transcribes these stories onto sheets of paper in a font size that ensures ease of reading for the students and organizes the story materials accordingly. Subsequently, the teacher enters the classroom, holding the story sheets in a visible manner.	Before the lesson begins, the students are ready and waiting in the classroom for the teacher.

1	When the teacher enters the classroom, they greet the students and ask how they are doing. Afterward, the teacher begins the lesson and sits in a way that allows all students to see, preparing to read the social story they have created to the students.	The students respond to the teacher's greeting and the question of how they are doing, and then they wait in anticipation to see what the teacher will teach them that day and what activities will be conducted.
2	The teacher reads the story aloud, supporting it with gestures and facial expressions. During the reading, the teacher adjusts the tone of voice and facial expressions according to the subject of the social story. The teacher ensures that the tone, gestures, and facial expressions used for emphasis do not become more attention-grabbing than the topic of the social story itself.	The students listen to the social story read by the teacher, carefully observe the elements the teacher uses to support the story, and try to understand the content and message of the social story.
3	After reading the social story to the students, the teacher hands it over and asks them to read it as well. If students request to read it several times, the teacher allows them to do so. Subsequently, the teacher performs a role-play of the story with one of the students from the class and asks the students to reenact the same scenario among themselves.	The students read the social story that the teacher has given them. Then, they carefully observe the role-play performed by the teacher with their classmate. Following the observation, they reenact the role-play among themselves under the teacher's guidance.
Evaluation	After completing the activity in the classroom, the teacher observes the greeting behaviors of the students and assesses how well the religious expressions used in greetings have been learned. The teacher records the observations and the status of the behavior's acquisition in a checklist.	It is expected that, because of the activity, students will learn the greeting behavior and the expressions used in greetings and incorporate them into their daily lives.

Targeted 21st Century / Higher-Order Thinking Skills in Activities

✓	Communication Skills		Leadership	Financial Literacy Skills	Information and Media Literacy	
✓	Collaborative Work	✓	Critical Thinking	✓	Social Responsibility	Innovative Thinking
	Entrepreneurship	✓	Analytical Thinking	Decision Making	Scientific Process Skills	

Worksheet

1. Social Story Example

How Do We Greet Each Other?

Sometimes, when I am walking home from school, I meet people I know. When people see each other on the street, they greet each other by saying "Selamün Aleyküm" and "Aleyküm Selam." When I see people I know on the street, I will try to greet them by saying "Selamün Aleyküm." It is a good thing for people to greet each other

2. Social Story Example

How to Be Economical?

Sometimes we might forget to turn off the lights. When people see lights left on, they turn them off. If we don't turn off the forgotten lights, we won't save energy. I like being economical. When I see a light left on, I will turn it off.

3. Social Story Example

How Do I Prepare for Prayer?

Before people pray, they make certain preparations. The first of these preparations is performing ablution (wudu). People take ablution before they pray. It is necessary to take ablution before praying. I will also perform ablution before I pray.

4. Social Story Example

Where Do I Throw My Trash?

When we finish using materials, we need to throw them away. People throw the materials they use into the trash bin. The materials I use may be finished and turn into trash. I will also throw my trash into the trash bin because it is the right thing to do.

5. Social Story Example

I Know My Flag

Every country has a flag. Each flag has different colors and shapes. My country also has a flag. My country's flag is red, and it has a white crescent and star on it. When I see it, I will know that it is my country's flag.

Result and Discussion

When evaluating the relevant program, it was observed that the guidelines for applying social stories and their frequency of application were insufficient. Therefore, as can be seen from the information provided in Table 2, a comprehensive application process has been developed, and the activity application has been categorized. It has been attempted to highlight the implications of using social stories more frequently in the religious education process, as social stories are commonly used in the education of individuals with autism. This

is because the structure and preparation of social stories not only make them suitable for the teaching processes of religious education but are also highly efficient in terms of application. Furthermore, the learning areas, topics, and achievements included in the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Course Teaching Program are also conducive to writing and using social stories. This situation provides the advantage of overcoming the challenges individuals face in understanding social situations with the help of social stories and, if necessary, supporting the process of understanding with different methods, techniques, tools, and materials. In this sense, social stories support the appropriate learning process.

As a result, using social stories in religious education can accelerate the learning process and facilitate individuals' understanding of abstract concepts or phenomena, allowing them to integrate these into their daily lives more easily.

Religious education targets situations that individuals may encounter in real life. Therefore, religious education helps individuals lead more peaceful and happy lives. This holds true for individuals with autism as well. The positive and healing effects of religion and religious education on the lives of individuals with autism have been expressed by researchers (Bilecik, 2019). Therefore, it has been deemed important to increase the efficiency of applications for individuals with autism in the religious education process, and the following conclusions have been reached during the study process:

Many religious concepts and expressions are abstract, and most religious rituals and practices are performed in communities or groups. Individuals with autism may have more difficulty understanding abstract concepts compared to typically developing individuals and may struggle with comprehending and participating in communal religious practices. Thus, it is a fact that religious education contributes to the socialization of individuals. This contribution is especially emphasized in terms of social acceptance. Therefore, the individual's ability to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, or behaviors learned in religious education in their environment also facilitates acceptance by others.

On the other hand, the moral values and behavioral training included in the content of the religious education process can be effective in the individual's daily life. For instance, the knowledge, skills, and behaviors related to the "Religion and Cleanliness" learning area are primarily directed toward daily life and the individual's experiences. During this educational process, alongside religious values, self-care skills are also taught to the individual. The information or behaviors the individual learns about cleanliness in these lessons are directly related to situations they may encounter and use in daily life. The individual can easily integrate and apply the information, skills, and values learned in class into their life. Indeed, the content of religious education often requires focusing on simple topics within life, rather than just knowledge and skills. Therefore, religious education programs or processes should be designed in a flexible manner that can be individualized according to the level of autism. With the preparation of such content, the individual's learning process can be accelerated, making it easier to impart the targeted knowledge, skills, and behaviors, and the program's goals can be achieved more quickly.

Since individuals with autism have different learning durations compared to other children, this becomes one of the areas to focus on in the religious education process. Their learning times may vary depending on the targeted knowledge, skills, and behaviors (Çopuroğlu & Mengi, 2014). Repeating an activity or implementation multiple times with the child and periodically renewing the repetitions to ensure the full and correct understanding of the activity is one of the elements that slow down the process. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to these aspects while preparing activities for the educational process.

For the learning process to be efficient, activities should be designed according to the level of the individuals, so they can make sense of the time they are in. Additionally, the

activity and all its steps should be demonstrated to the child. Activities should be accessible and within the child's view as much as possible. The process of the activity and its implementation steps should be supported with writing and visuals, and the activity sheets should be ready on the child's desk. In this way, the child can see and know the order of the activities. Such implementations can accelerate the child's learning process.

Another important aspect in the learning process of individuals with autism in religious education is the use of learning-supportive tools and materials. The use of materials containing visual elements that support the activities, along with activities aligned with the program's objectives, positively affects the learning process. For example, when teaching the learning outcome "Says that the Quran is the holy book of Islam," working with a Quran and giving children the opportunity to examine it could help ensure the information is retained and foster positive interest in the Quran. Throughout the educational process, using tools and materials in suitable environments and conditions creates a positive atmosphere for both the student and the teacher, making the lesson more enjoyable and turning it into a productive learning environment.

Care should be taken with the materials and tools used so that the child's focus is not diverted away from the lesson and directed to colors, patterns, or elements in the materials. If there are any objects, colors, or other items that the child may be fixated on, which might distract them completely from the lesson and cause them to lose focus, such elements should be avoided.

Before starting the educational process, the individual's level of autism should be determined, the student's individual characteristics should be known, and the student should be well understood. The educational process should proceed based on these characteristics. The teacher's competence in both special education and the content of the program is crucial. If the teacher is inadequate, it could affect the success of the program and reduce the quality of education. On the other hand, constantly observing and adjusting the learning duration to determine when the child learns more quickly and effectively is vital. When the learning duration is properly adjusted, the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and behaviors will become easier.

The teacher's expertise in the field of religious education is an important factor in the education of individuals with autism. A teacher providing religious education should be competent both in special education and religious education. Therefore, the knowledge, skills, and values gained by teacher candidates during their undergraduate education in departments like RCMK and theological faculties are critical. Moreover, the quality of the formation courses offered in theological faculties and the qualifications of the academic staff teaching these courses should be thorough, ensuring that teacher candidates receive comprehensive training in both knowledge and skills.

Social stories are short narratives containing behavioral cues about situations that individuals may encounter in their social lives and daily routines. They provide answers to questions such as "who, what, where, when, and why" regarding the social situations they involve.

Social stories are used to help achieve the goals of the program by addressing situations individuals may encounter in their daily lives and social lives. Particularly for individuals with autism who are literate, social stories are often used as a technique where they can read the stories themselves or read them to their peers. Social stories are specifically prepared to explain and teach social behaviors. Through their sentence structures, children can understand the reasons behind a behavior and under what conditions people exhibit that behavior. Additionally, through social stories, individuals can gain knowledge about religious practices and places of worship (such as mosques and prayer halls) and can be integrated into

these practices. Social stories, being one of the possible methods and techniques in the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge curriculum, can be easily used in the process of imparting various knowledge, skills, and values. Additionally, they can be used as a complementary and supporting technique alongside other methods.

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