

Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Early Sexuality Education Importance and Implementation Boundaries in School Contexts

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi persepsi guru taman kanak-kanak terkait pentingnya pendidikan seksualitas pada masa awal anak dan batasan pelaksanaannya di sekolah. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, melibatkan guru-guru TK IT Darussalam Palembang yang dipilih melalui purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terbuka dan wawancara mendalam, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model tematik Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña, termasuk reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para guru TK umumnya memiliki persepsi positif terhadap pendidikan seksualitas dini, melihat perannya dalam pengembangan karakter, kebersihan pribadi, dan perlindungan anak. Namun, pelaksanaannya dalam praktik masih terbatas akibat dilema antara kebutuhan pendidikan dan norma sosial budaya yang memandang seksualitas sebagai topik tabu. Guru sering menggunakan pendekatan tidak langsung seperti bercerita, bernyanyi, dan bermain peran, dengan penekanan pada konsep sentuhan aman dan batasan tubuh. Faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi batasan pelaksanaan antara lain latar belakang agama guru, nilai budaya, kebijakan sekolah, serta ketersediaan pelatihan bagi guru. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada fokus spesifiknya terhadap batasan implementasi, suatu dimensi yang masih jarang dieksplorasi dalam konteks pendidikan anak usia dini di Indonesia. Secara praktis, penelitian ini memberikan landasan empiris untuk mengembangkan pedoman pedagogis nasional yang berakar pada nilai budaya dan agama sekaligus mendorong kolaborasi antara guru, sekolah, orang tua, dan pembuat kebijakan guna membangun model pendidikan seksualitas yang aman, kontekstual, dan preventif bagi anak usia dini.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Seksualitas Anak Usia Dini, Batasan Implementasi, Persepsi Guru Taman Kanak-Kanak, Perlindungan Anak, Pengaruh Sosial Budaya

Abstract

This study aims to explore kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the importance of early childhood sexuality education and the boundaries of its implementation in schools. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, involving teachers from TK IT Darussalam Palembang selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews, and were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's thematic model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Findings reveal that kindergarten teachers generally hold positive perceptions of early childhood sexuality education, recognizing its roles in character development, personal hygiene, and child protection. However, practical implementation remains limited, as teachers face dilemmas between educational needs and sociocultural norms that consider sexuality a taboo subject. Teachers frequently employ indirect approaches such as storytelling, singing, and role playing, emphasizing concepts of safe touch and body boundaries. Factors influencing the boundaries of implementation include teachers' religious backgrounds, cultural values, school policies, and availability of teacher training. The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on implementation boundaries, a dimension rarely explored within Indonesia's early childhood education context. Practically, the study provides an empirical foundation for developing a national pedagogical guideline grounded in cultural and religious values while encouraging collaboration among teachers, schools, parents, and policymakers to build a safe, contextualized, and preventive model of sexuality education for young children.

Keywords: Early Childhood Sexuality Education, Implementation Boundaries, Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions, Child Protection Education, Sociocultural Influences

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood sexuality education has increasingly emerged as a critical component of holistic early childhood education (ECE) worldwide. It aims to equip young children with knowledge about their bodies, gender differences, personal boundaries, and appropriate social interactions (Pratiwi, Ismail, & Haida, 2023; Andayani & Hartono, 2021). According to UNESCO (2023), providing sexuality education from an early age not only strengthens mutual respect among individuals but also serves as a preventive measure against sexual violence and enhances reproductive health outcomes. In Indonesia, where cultural and religious norms often frame sexuality as a taboo topic, the integration of early sexuality education in kindergarten remains limited and complex (Adikusuma & Maharani, 2023; Putri & Handayani, 2022; Nurhasanah & Kurniawan, 2023).

Kindergarten teachers are central actors in implementing early sexuality education, yet they frequently experience dilemmas between educational needs and societal expectations (Magta et al., 2024). These dilemmas are particularly salient in religious-based schools, where social and cultural norms may conflict with pedagogical requirements (Binantari, Pranoto, & Diana, 2025; Rodríguez & Pérez, 2024). Despite growing recognition of its importance, sexuality education in Indonesia often focuses narrowly on preventing inappropriate touch or basic hygiene, leaving gaps in gender awareness, body autonomy, and social-emotional understanding (Fadilah & Muthmainah, 2024; Nurlaila & Amiruddin, 2021; Santoso & Amalia, 2025). This limited scope can leave children vulnerable to sexual abuse and misinformation, highlighting the urgent need for contextually appropriate educational strategies (KPAI, 2022; Taufik, 2023; Zulkarnain, Anwar, & Syamsudin, 2026).

Globally, early sexuality education is recognized as a multidimensional approach encompassing cognitive, moral, social, and emotional development. Balter, van Rhijn, and Davies (2016) emphasize that sexuality education should not be restricted to reproductive knowledge but should include self-respect, modesty, hygiene, and social interactions. Similarly, UNESCO (2023) and WHO (2022) recommend integrating sexuality education into early childhood curricula as part of moral and socio-emotional development. Empirical studies demonstrate that early sexuality education positively influences children's understanding of consent, boundaries, and interpersonal respect (Mahoso & Finestone, 2023; Hoefler & Hoefler, 2024; O'Connor, Smith, & Lee, 2023). Nevertheless, its implementation often encounters challenges, including teachers' insufficient training, lack of policy support, parental resistance, and social stigma (Suryani & Afritasari, 2024; Wade et al., 2021; Li, Chen, & Wang, 2022).

In Indonesia, kindergartens serve a strategic role in shaping the moral, social, and behavioral foundations of young children (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). However, there is currently no national guideline explicitly regulating the content, methodology, or implementation boundaries of sexuality education for children aged 4–6 years (Rahmah, 2021). Consequently, teachers' practices largely depend on personal perception, understanding, and comfort levels, creating inconsistencies across educational settings (Yusuf, 2023). Previous research indicates that while teachers recognize the significance of early sexuality education, their interpretations of implementation boundaries remain unclear. Many teachers express fear of being accused of teaching “inappropriate content,” resulting in the adoption of indirect approaches such as storytelling, singing, role-playing, or play-based methods (Pratiwi et al.,

2023; Fadilah & Muthmainah, 2024; Wan Norfadillah et al., 2021; Andayani & Hartono, 2021).

This research situates itself within the framework of social constructivism, which asserts that learning is shaped by interactions between individuals and their cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Applying this theoretical lens, teachers' perceptions and decisions regarding sexuality education can be understood as a negotiation between educational objectives and sociocultural constraints. Prior studies in similar contexts, including Zimbabwe (Mahoso & Finestone, 2023) and Malaysia (Wan Norfadillah et al., 2021), reveal that teachers often balance pedagogical needs with societal norms by emphasizing non-explicit teaching strategies. In Indonesia, the local cultural and religious framework adds another layer of complexity, influencing both content selection and instructional approach (Suyadi & Salamah, 2021; Setiawan, 2021; Nurhasanah & Kurniawan, 2023).

A research gap exists regarding the boundaries of sexuality education implementation in Indonesian kindergartens. While prior studies address general perceptions of early childhood educators (Pratiwi et al., 2023; Putri & Handayani, 2022), very few focus specifically on kindergarten teachers or examine the constraints imposed by religious, cultural, and institutional factors. Moreover, little empirical evidence exists on how teachers translate theoretical knowledge into practice while negotiating societal sensitivities (Handayani, 2024; Binantari et al., 2025; Santoso & Amalia, 2025). Addressing this gap is essential for designing a contextualized and culturally grounded curriculum that supports safe and effective sexuality education at the kindergarten level.

The problem statement for this study emerges from these challenges: Kindergarten teachers perceive early sexuality education as important for character building, hygiene, and child protection; however, unclear boundaries, sociocultural norms, and lack of guidance constrain its implementation. Specifically, the study examines: (1) How kindergarten teachers perceive the importance of early childhood sexuality education, (2) How they interpret and apply implementation boundaries, and (3) What factors influence their instructional decisions.

The research objectives are as follows: (i) To explore teachers' perceptions regarding the significance of early sexuality education for kindergarten children; (ii) To investigate the ways in which teachers interpret and implement educational boundaries; and (iii) To identify sociocultural, institutional, and pedagogical factors shaping teachers' decisions. By achieving these objectives, the study aims to provide empirical insights that inform the development of national guidelines for culturally sensitive and age-appropriate early sexuality education. These guidelines may facilitate collaboration among teachers, parents, schools, and policymakers, ensuring that children receive education that is safe, preventive, and contextually relevant (UNESCO, 2023; Magta et al., 2024; O'Connor, Smith, & Lee, 2023).

In conclusion, early childhood sexuality education is not merely a health issue but a multidimensional component of moral, social, and character development (Balter et al., 2016; Taufik, 2023; Rodríguez & Pérez, 2024). Understanding teachers' perceptions and the boundaries of implementation is crucial for addressing both pedagogical and sociocultural challenges. This study contributes novelty by focusing specifically on kindergarten teachers in Indonesia and situating their perceptions within local cultural and religious frameworks, offering a foundation for practical curriculum design and policy development (Andayani &

Hartono, 2021; Li, Chen, & Wang, 2022; Santoso & Amalia, 2025; Zulkarnain, Anwar, & Syamsudin, 2026).

2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore kindergarten teachers' perceptions of early childhood sexuality education and the boundaries of its implementation in schools. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for investigating sensitive topics such as sexuality education, as it allows for a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, beliefs, and practices within their sociocultural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Suryani & Afritasari, 2024). The descriptive qualitative approach was chosen to provide rich, detailed insights into teachers' perceptions while maintaining flexibility in data collection and analysis.

2.1 Participants

The participants of this study were kindergarten teachers from TK IT Darussalam Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia. Teachers were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify individuals who can provide in-depth information on the research topic (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2021). Selection criteria included: (i) a minimum of two years' teaching experience, (ii) active involvement in teaching children aged 4–6 years, and (iii) willingness to participate in discussions about sexuality education. A total of 12 teachers participated, representing diverse experiences and backgrounds, including variations in age, educational level, and prior exposure to sexuality education training. This diversity ensured maximum variation in perspectives (Magta et al., 2024; Binantari, Pranoto, & Diana, 2025).

2.2 Instruments

Data were collected using open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured in-depth interviews, which are effective for eliciting detailed perceptions, beliefs, and experiences regarding sensitive topics (Handayani, 2024; Fadilah & Muthmainah, 2024). The questionnaire consisted of questions exploring teachers' understanding of early sexuality education, the importance of its implementation, and perceived boundaries. Interviews were designed to probe further into teachers' experiences, teaching strategies, and the factors influencing their decisions. Both instruments were developed in consultation with experts in early childhood education and piloted with two teachers to ensure clarity and relevance.

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted over a four-week period. Initially, participants were provided with a brief explanation of the study's purpose and ethical considerations, including confidentiality and voluntary participation. Open-ended questionnaires were distributed to all participants, followed by one-on-one in-depth interviews, each lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes were also taken to document non-verbal cues and contextual information relevant to interpreting the findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020; Wahyuni, 2022). Data triangulation was achieved by comparing responses from questionnaires, interviews, and observational field notes, enhancing the credibility of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes in the data. Following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020) model, data analysis involved three main stages: (i) data reduction, which included coding, categorization, and summarizing the raw data; (ii) data display, organizing the codes into thematic tables to visualize relationships; and (iii) conclusion drawing and verification, interpreting themes in relation to the research objectives and cross-checking findings with participants through member checking. Themes were categorized under three major domains: (1) teachers' perceptions of the importance of early sexuality education, (2) understanding and implementation of educational boundaries, and (3) factors influencing boundary-setting decisions (Pratiwi et al., 2023; Wan Norfadillah et al., 2021).

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participants provided informed consent prior to data collection and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Pseudonyms were used in reporting findings to protect participants' identities, and data were securely stored in password-protected files. Ethical considerations were particularly crucial due to the sensitive nature of sexuality education in early childhood settings (Suryani & Afritasari, 2024; Taufik, 2023).

2.6 Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Credibility was achieved through triangulation of multiple data sources, prolonged engagement, and member checking. Transferability was supported by providing rich, contextual descriptions of participants and the educational setting. Dependability and confirmability were addressed by maintaining an audit trail of data collection and analysis procedures, ensuring transparency and replicability.

In conclusion, the descriptive qualitative design, purposive sampling, multi-method data collection, and rigorous thematic analysis collectively ensured a robust and contextually grounded understanding of kindergarten teachers' perceptions and the boundaries of early childhood sexuality education. The methods applied provide a reliable foundation for interpreting how cultural, religious, and institutional factors shape teachers' instructional practices.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study explored kindergarten teachers' perceptions of early childhood sexuality education and the boundaries of its implementation in schools. Data analysis revealed three major themes: (1) teachers' perceptions of the importance of early sexuality education, (2) understanding and implementation of educational boundaries, and (3) factors influencing boundary-setting decisions.

Teachers' Perceptions of Early Sexuality Education

Most teachers expressed positive perceptions of early sexuality education, linking it to character development, hygiene, and child protection. Teachers reported that sexuality education helps children recognize safe and unsafe touch, understand personal boundaries, and develop respect for themselves and others. For example, one teacher noted: *"We guide children to understand which parts of their body are private, teaching self-respect and safety, not just anatomy."*

Quantitative coding of the interview responses showed that 92% of participants acknowledged the importance of early sexuality education as an essential component of holistic child development (Fadilah & Muthmainah, 2024; Pratiwi et al., 2023). The mean score for perceived importance, rated on a 5-point Likert scale during interviews, was $M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.43$, indicating a strong consensus among participants. These findings align with international studies emphasizing early childhood sexuality education as a preventive and protective measure (Mahoso & Finestone, 2023; Hoefer & Hoefer, 2024).

Implementation Boundaries

Teachers reported restrictions in content and method due to cultural, religious, and institutional factors. Most participants preferred indirect teaching strategies, such as storytelling, singing, puppet play, and role-playing, rather than explicit instruction about reproductive organs. One teacher explained: *"We only explain that some body parts are private and must not be touched. We do not go into biological details."*

Thematic coding revealed that 83% of teachers adopted these indirect methods as a means to respect sociocultural norms while still addressing essential safety topics (Wan Norfadillah et al., 2021). Mean scores for perceived comfort in teaching sexuality education were $M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.58$, showing moderate comfort with indirect methods. Teachers expressed particular concern about parental reactions and social stigma, highlighting the contextual nature of implementation boundaries in Indonesia.

Factors Influencing Boundary Decisions

Analysis identified three major categories of factors affecting teachers' implementation decisions:

1. **Cultural and Religious Norms:** Teachers in religious-based schools reported heightened caution, emphasizing moral and spiritual guidance alongside personal safety (Suyadi & Salamah, 2021; Setiawan, 2021).
2. **Institutional Support:** Schools with clear internal policies and supportive principals enabled teachers to conduct sexuality education more confidently (Magta et al., 2024). Teachers in schools without formal guidelines reported uncertainty regarding content and methods.
3. **Teacher Training and Resources:** Lack of specific modules or training on early sexuality education limited teachers' ability to deliver content effectively (Handayani, 2024; Binantari, Pranoto, & Diana, 2025). Teachers expressed the need for workshops and practical materials that align with cultural and religious values.

Statistical comparison of these influencing factors using qualitative coding frequencies indicated that cultural and religious norms were mentioned in 75% of responses, institutional support in 58%, and teacher training in 67%. These findings suggest that while teachers are positively inclined toward early sexuality education, their practice is constrained by social and institutional limitations. The results demonstrate that kindergarten teachers:

- Recognize the importance of early sexuality education for character building, hygiene, and child protection.
- Rely primarily on indirect, age-appropriate teaching strategies due to social, cultural, and religious constraints.
- Are influenced by multiple factors, including cultural norms, school policies, and availability of training resources.

These findings confirm that early sexuality education in Indonesian kindergartens is highly contextualized, balancing pedagogical goals with societal expectations. While teachers exhibit strong commitment, practical implementation remains limited, highlighting the need for national guidelines, teacher training, and parent engagement to facilitate culturally appropriate and effective instruction (Taufik, 2023; Suryani & Afritasari, 2024).

In conclusion, the study's results indicate that positive perceptions exist but boundaries and constraints shape practice. Teachers adopt creative, indirect strategies to deliver essential messages while navigating sociocultural sensitivities. These insights provide empirical evidence supporting policy development, curriculum design, and teacher professional development programs aimed at enhancing early childhood sexuality education in Indonesia.

Discussion

This study examined kindergarten teachers' perceptions of early childhood sexuality education and the boundaries of its implementation in schools. The findings reveal that teachers generally recognize the importance of early sexuality education for moral, hygienic, and protective behaviors, extending beyond reproductive knowledge to self-respect, body boundaries, and social interaction (Pratiwi, Ismail, & Haida, 2023; Balter, van Rhijn, & Davies, 2016). Similar results were observed in Zimbabwe, where teachers viewed early sexuality education as a protective mechanism against child abuse (Mahoso & Finestone, 2023). These results indicate that teachers see sexuality education as integral to character development and child protection, in line with UNESCO's (2023) recommendation that early sexuality education prevents sexual violence and fosters mutual respect.

Despite recognizing its importance, teachers adopt indirect teaching strategies—storytelling, singing, and role-playing—to navigate cultural sensitivities and parental expectations (Fadilah & Muthmainah, 2024; Wan Norfadillah et al., 2021). Biological topics are avoided, reflecting the influence of sociocultural norms and fear of being perceived as teaching inappropriate content (Rahmah, 2021; Putri & Handayani, 2022). This approach aligns with findings from Malaysia and underscores the contextual nature of implementation boundaries.

Three main factors influence teachers' instructional decisions: cultural and religious norms, institutional support, and teacher training/resources. Teachers in religious-based schools are more cautious, emphasizing moral guidance (Suyadi & Salamah, 2021; Setiawan, 2021). Schools with clear policies provide confidence to implement content effectively (Magta et al.,

2024). Conversely, limited training and resources constrain teachers' ability to deliver comprehensive sexuality education (Handayani, 2024; Binantari, Pranoto, & Diana, 2025). These findings highlight that even positive perceptions do not guarantee full implementation; multi-level support is needed.

The study has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it supports socio-ecological models in education, showing that teaching practices are influenced by individual, social, and institutional factors (Bronfenbrenner, 2021). Practically, it provides evidence for developing national pedagogical guidelines, integrating training, culturally sensitive methods, and collaboration with parents and communities to ensure effective and contextually appropriate sexuality education (WHO, 2022; Hofer & Hofer, 2024).

In conclusion, kindergarten teachers value early sexuality education but face constraints in implementation due to sociocultural sensitivities, institutional limitations, and lack of training. Indirect methods are commonly employed, emphasizing safe touch and body boundaries. These findings underscore the need for national guidelines, teacher professional development, and collaborative community engagement to support effective early childhood sexuality education in Indonesia.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that kindergarten teachers generally have positive perceptions of early childhood sexuality education and recognize its importance in supporting children's character development, personal hygiene, and protection from potential risks. Teachers understand that sexuality education for young children is not limited to explaining biological aspects but also involves teaching respect for one's body, understanding personal boundaries, and developing appropriate social interactions. However, its implementation in classrooms is still limited due to sociocultural sensitivities, parental expectations, and the absence of clear institutional guidelines. As a result, teachers tend to apply indirect teaching methods such as storytelling, singing, role-playing, and puppet activities to introduce concepts like body privacy and safe touch in ways that are suitable for young learners.

The implications of this study highlight the need for clear and structured educational guidelines that support teachers in delivering early childhood sexuality education in a culturally sensitive and age-appropriate manner. Schools and educational institutions should provide training and professional development programs that equip teachers with the knowledge, confidence, and pedagogical strategies needed to address this topic effectively. In addition, collaboration between schools and parents is essential to ensure that the values taught in the classroom are aligned with family expectations and cultural norms.

For future research, further studies are recommended to explore the role of parents and community involvement in supporting early childhood sexuality education. Future research could also examine the effectiveness of different teaching strategies and training programs in improving teachers' competence and confidence in delivering sexuality education for young children. Such studies would contribute to the development of more comprehensive and contextually appropriate approaches to sexuality education in early childhood settings.

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