

# Exploring the Experiences of Muslim Early Childhood Educators in Teaching Sexuality Education

## Pengalaman Pendidik Anak Usia Dini Muslim dalam Mengajar Pendidikan Seksualitas

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### ABSTRAK

Pendidikan seksualitas pada anak usia dini sangat penting untuk melindungi anak dari konten seksual yang tidak pantas dan potensi pelecehan. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya pendidikan tersebut dalam konteks guru Muslim. Tujuan utama dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mendapatkan wawasan tentang penerapan praktis pendidikan seksualitas selama masa usia dini. Studi ini melibatkan partisipasi dari 248 guru Muslim pendidikan anak usia dini. Dengan mengumpulkan pertanyaan terbuka, menganalisis tanggapan secara verbatim, dan mengkategorikan hasilnya, penelitian ini mengungkap tanggung jawab multifaset dari para guru tersebut. Peran mereka termasuk memberikan panduan tentang penggunaan toilet, mengurangi perilaku menyentuh diri sendiri, menangani rasa ingin tahu seksual, mempromosikan kesehatan dan kebersihan genital, mencegah pelecehan seksual, dan mengenali spektrum peran gender. Temuan ini menyoroti urgensi pengembangan kurikulum yang terstruktur dengan baik, mendorong kerjasama antara orang tua dan guru, menyediakan pelatihan khusus untuk guru, mempromosikan persepsi publik yang positif tentang pendidikan seksualitas, dan memastikan keterlibatan pemerintah yang substansial dalam pendidikan seksualitas anak usia dini.

**Kata Kunci:** Guru Muslim; Implementasi Praktis; Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini; Pendidikan Seksualitas

### ABSTRACT

Early childhood sexuality education is essential for safeguarding young children against inappropriate sexual content and potential abuse. This study underscores the importance of such education within the context of Muslim teachers. The primary objective of this research is to gain insights into the practical implementation of sexuality education during early childhood. The study encompasses the participation of 248 Muslim early childhood teachers. By collecting open-ended inquiries, analyzing responses verbatim, and categorizing the results, the research illuminates the multifaceted responsibilities of these teachers. Their roles include providing guidance on toileting, mitigating self-touch behaviors, addressing sexual curiosity, promoting genital health and hygiene, preventing sexual harassment, and recognizing the spectrum of gender roles. The findings highlight the urgency of developing a well-structured curriculum, fostering collaboration between parents and teachers, providing specialized teacher training, promoting a positive public perception of sexuality education, and ensuring substantial government involvement in early childhood sexual education.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education; Muslim Teachers; Practical Implementation; Sexuality Education

### INTRODUCTION

In the early stages of a child's development, it is imperative to provide them with comprehensive sexuality education as an integral component of an extensive educational curriculum (Robinson and Davies 2017). Cultivating attitudes, values, and behaviours that foster good relationships, promote high self-esteem, and enhance general well-being during early childhood is crucial. Providing children with age-appropriate and accurate information about their bodies, relationships, and boundaries during their early developmental stages is essential for building a solid foundation for their future personal and social growth (Venketsamy and Kinear 2020).

The complex landscape of sexuality education within the context of Islam, particularly its importance for young Muslims, underscores numerous challenges in this field (Rassool and Khan 2020). One prominent challenge is the lack of comprehensive

research and reliable literature accessible to present-day Muslim clergy. This draws focus to the complex terrain of sexuality education within the framework of Islam. The scarcity of reliable sources hinders the provision of comprehensive and accurate information about sexuality education within the framework of Islam.

The situation is further complicated by the presence of diverse socio-economic, political, educational, and cultural aspects in numerous countries with a Muslim-majority population (Khalaf et al. 2014). These complexities can lead to hesitancy among teachers and scholars in discussing contentious subjects. Based on the assertions posited in the discourse, it is argued that the pervasive influence of the Internet and social media has introduced a wide array of sexual norms and concepts, affecting the perceptions and attitudes of contemporary young Muslims (Ismail et al. 2022). Given these circumstances, it becomes increasingly crucial to imbue youngsters with Islamic perspectives on sexuality, enabling them to anchor their conduct on moral precepts.

Despite the acknowledgment of the importance of early sexuality education, there might be resistance or hesitancy from some individuals or groups within religious communities to address these topics with children as young as five years old. This could stem from concerns about age-appropriateness, cultural sensitivities, or religious interpretations regarding the timing and content of sexual education. Therefore, the interesting problem lies in navigating these complexities and exploring how to effectively integrate sexuality education within religious contexts while addressing potential barriers or objections.

Prior studies have indicated that a significant number of early childhood teachers exhibit a lack of confidence and express unease when it comes to imparting sexuality instruction to young children. Based on the research conducted by Balter, van Rhijn, and Davies, it was observed that several early childhood teachers in Canada have voiced a need for further professional development in the area of sexual education (2016). This demand stems from their limited understanding of appropriate sexual content for young children. Similarly, Counterman and Kirkwood (2013) conducted a study that revealed that certain early childhood teachers in the United States expressed a lack of confidence in their knowledge of the initial phases of sexual development in children. These teachers also reported experiencing discomfort when engaging in discussions about sexuality with children and their families. This research aims to analyse the experiences and strategies of Muslim ECE teachers in conveying sexuality education themes to young children.

Previous studies regarding the implementation of sexuality education in early childhood education have underscored the necessity of addressing concerns about sexual harassment and violence, particularly by local religious and cultural norms. This paper emphasizes the importance of sex education tailored to Islamic principles for young children. Building upon existing research, Nizar's findings reveal a gap in children's knowledge regarding gender, body parts, and boundaries (2021). Additionally, Moghadam highlights the pivotal roles of parents and educators in imparting sexual education, integrating Islamic teachings with scientific knowledge to nurture healthy attitudes towards sexuality (2019). Meanwhile, Ramadhani's study sheds light on the lack of sexual education in coastal regions, where parents often defer such teachings to schools (2021). Banunnah's research proposes a comprehensive framework for integrating key sex education topics into preschool curricula, including body awareness, relationships, life cycles, health, emotions, and safety (2018).

There is a significant distinction between how sexuality is taught in Islamic schools compared to Western schools. The interrelationship between Islamic sexuality education and core Islamic beliefs and values critiques the Western model for reducing the significance of moral elements in favour of pragmatic concerns like disease prevention and contraception. Islamic sexuality education adopts a more targeted methodology, tailoring content to different age groups while maintaining a foundation based on Islamic values. The basic principle of this belief system emphasizes the importance of modesty, marital institutions, and abstinence before marriage to maintain moral integrity and social stability. Modesty in behaviour, dress, and interactions helps foster respect and prevent immoral behaviour by reducing temptation. Marriage is considered a sacred institution that provides a stable and lawful framework for intimate relationships, ensuring mutual respect, rights,

and a strong family structure. Abstinence before marriage is encouraged to maintain moral and spiritual purity and to prevent issues such as unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and the emotional consequences of premarital sexual relationships. In contrast, non-Islamic perspectives, particularly in Western societies, often focus on comprehensive sexuality education that emphasizes individual autonomy, informed choices, personal responsibility, contraception, consent, and acceptance of diverse lifestyles, aiming to empower individuals to make safe and respectful decisions about their sexual health and relationships (Rassool and Khan 2020; Sanjakdar 2016).

Within Islam, the dissemination of sexual knowledge is not prohibited, and there are instances where religious authorities and Islamic law address various sexual matters. For example, Islamic scholars and jurists have written extensively on marital relations, sexual ethics, and family life, drawing from Quranic teachings and Hadith. These discussions encompass guidance on consent issues, marriage rights and responsibilities, and the urgency of maintaining modesty in encounters between genders. However, in more conservative cultural settings, discussions about sexuality may be limited or taboo, with little formal education available and topics often considered private or inappropriate for public discourse (Bouhdiba 2013).

Starting sexuality education in early childhood, even as young as five years old, is recommended to underscore its importance during the formative stages of development. The primary goal is to provide essential knowledge about human anatomy, promote healthy behaviours, and instil a heightened awareness of self-protection. Active participation from influential figures such as parents, teachers, and authority figures is widely acknowledged as crucial for the comprehensive development and inclusive sexual education (Tabatabaie 2015). This research addresses the intriguing challenge of integrating sexuality education into early childhood, particularly within religious contexts, while navigating societal taboos and discomfort surrounding the topic. Despite indications that some religious frameworks view sexuality education as normal, there are still obstacles to openly discussing and implementing it, particularly with young children. This study investigates how early childhood educators employ innovative methods to introduce sexual themes while respecting cultural and religious sensitivities. By identifying various pedagogical strategies, the research aims to illuminate effective approaches for conveying knowledge on anatomy topics, health behaviours, and safety. Ultimately, the study seeks to ensure that sexuality education in early childhood is culturally and religiously sensitive, meeting the developmental needs of young learners.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Importance of Early Sexuality Education**

The early childhood phase is commonly perceived as a naturally occurring stage that is an intrinsic aspect of human biological maturation. However, this perspective has faced criticism for its failure to recognize the diversity present within this stage and how it fluctuates based on historical, geographical, political, and economic contexts. The formative years of an individual's life are influenced by a diverse range of characteristics, encompassing cultural background, socioeconomic status, financial position, racial and ethnic identity, familial connections, age, abilities, and additional elements. The cultural and social constructs around early infancy, including norms regarding appropriate behaviours and anxieties related to sexuality, are established and influenced by adult individuals. These structures encompass matters about sexuality (Robinson and Davies 2017).

There exists a prevalent inclination to idealize the qualities of purity, naivety, selflessness, irrationality, and limited comprehension that are emblematic of the state of early childhood innocence (Robinson et al. 2017). This concept offers a framework that restricts early childhood from obtaining specific types of information, particularly those about their sexual orientation. Nevertheless, the avoidance of discussions on sexuality can impede children's capacity to comprehend the subject matter, while concurrently compelling them to seek information from potentially unreliable sources (Moore and Reynolds 2017).

The provision of comprehensive education to children regarding their anatomical knowledge, appropriate personal boundaries, and the identification of inappropriate physical contact is of utmost significance (Goldfarb and Lieberman 2021). This educational approach equips children with the necessary skills to discern and promptly report instances of abuse. For example, a case study by Walsh et al. (2015 2018) demonstrated that children who received early sexuality education were more likely to report inappropriate behaviour, leading to a decrease in instances of abuse. This comprehension can aid in the prevention of sexual abuse of minors and empower children to assert themselves when confronted with circumstances that elicit discomfort.

The introduction of sexuality education at an early stage promotes the establishment of transparent and sincere dialogue among children, their parents, and their teachers (Barr et al. 2014). The acquisition of knowledge among children involves recognizing that they have the opportunity to seek guidance and support from trustworthy adults in their lives. This recognition plays a significant role in fostering a secure and supportive environment for discussing sensitive topics. A longitudinal study by Barr et al. (2014) found that open communication about sexuality within families contributed to stronger, more trusting relationships.

During the initial stages of childhood development, children start to develop an awareness of the differences that exist between themselves and their peers. The exposure of children to diverse relationships, family structures, and gender roles during their early years enhances their capacity to empathize, tolerate, and embrace individuals who possess dissimilarities (Christov-Moore et al. 2014). Engaging children in discussions centred on self-acceptance and body positivity can prove advantageous, as it facilitates the cultivation of a positive rapport with their physical selves and reduces the likelihood of encountering issues associated with body image. Children exhibit an inherent curiosity towards their anatomical structures and the mechanisms by which they operate. By providing age- and developmentally-suitable responses to children's questions, it is possible to assist them in cultivating a positive and respectful comprehension of their physicality and sexual identity (Balter et al. 2016; Breuner et al. 2016).

### **Addressing Challenges and Criticism**

While early sexuality education offers numerous benefits, it is not without its challenges and criticisms. Some opponents argue that introducing sexuality education at a young age can cause confusion or inappropriate behaviour among children (Angelides 2019; Gilbert 2021). These critics fear that early exposure to topics related to sexuality might lead to premature sexual curiosity or actions. They believe that children might not have the maturity to comprehend such information appropriately, which could result in misinterpretations or even inappropriate behaviours among peers (Baku et al. 2018; Holman and Koenig Kellas 2018).

Another significant criticism is the belief that sexuality education should be the responsibility of parents, not schools (Zulu et al. 2019). Many parents feel that they should have the primary role in educating their children about sexuality, as it allows them to tailor the information to align with their family values and beliefs. This perspective is particularly prevalent in communities with strong cultural or religious convictions, where parents might fear that school-based programs could conflict with their teachings.

The accommodation of sexuality education from culturally diverse sections of society can also give rise to value frictions. Different cultures have varying beliefs and norms regarding sexuality, and a one-size-fits-all approach to sexuality education can inadvertently clash with these values (Bhana et al. 2023; Leung et al. 2019). For instance, what is considered appropriate to discuss regarding sexuality in one culture might be seen as taboo in another. These cultural differences can lead to conflicts between educators, parents, and communities, complicating the implementation of a universal sexuality education curriculum (Sanjakdar 2018).

Even the use of the term "sexuality" for early childhood is still debated (Sajaniemi et al. 2020). Some critics argue that the terminology itself can be misleading or alarming, suggesting that it might be inappropriate to associate young children with concepts that adults typically link to sexual behaviour. This concern stems from a misunderstanding of

what early sexuality education entails, which primarily focuses on anatomical knowledge, personal boundaries, and respect for oneself and others, rather than on sexual behaviour per se.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study focuses on early childhood education (ECE) institutions in the urban area of Banjarmasin, Indonesia. Preliminary research revealed that teachers with religious backgrounds often hold negative perceptions of sexuality education for young children. To investigate this issue, we concentrated on Muslim teachers in ECE settings. The primary objective was to examine how the professional backgrounds of these teachers influence their attitudes, interactions, and expectations regarding sexuality education.

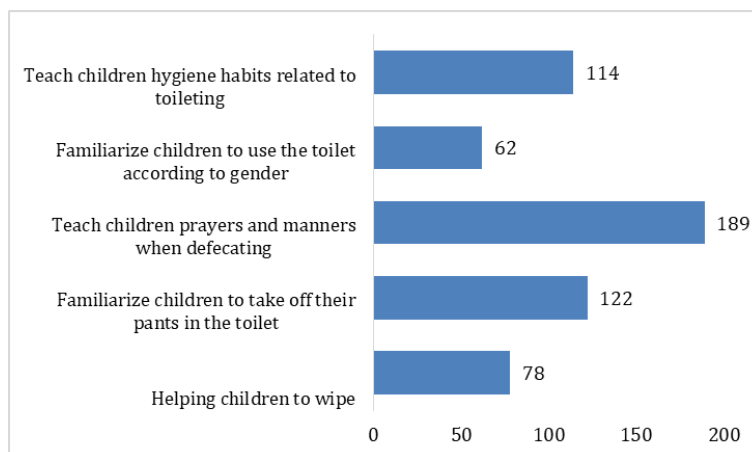
Based on 2020 data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) for Banjarmasin, the city has 61 ECE institutions employing 2,696 teachers. Using Isaac Michael's table with a significance level of 10%, we determined a sample size of 248 participants. The sample was randomly selected, and participants were administered an online questionnaire. The data collection process involved using open-ended questions administered via Google Forms. Participants provided free-text responses, and then examined verbatim, ensuring the content was understood without modifications or edits. This analysis was to preserve the original context and extract the suggested meanings from each response. After categorizing the responses into distinct thematic patterns, the researcher conducted a comprehensive analysis to identify additional patterns and fluctuations. These findings were then quantitatively presented, providing further insights into the data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Toileting

In early childhood sexuality education, teachers prioritize teaching toileting skills, including guiding children to the restroom, teaching them how to undress properly, and supporting personal hygiene. Toilet training follows a developmental timeline, beginning with children recognizing daytime bowel signals and progressing to mastering night-time bowel control. As they develop, children gradually learn to identify signals for daytime urination, though night-time urination may take longer to adapt to. This developmental process coincides with preschool or kindergarten enrolment, marking an important milestone in a child's early years.

**Table 1.** Sexuality education in toileting activities.



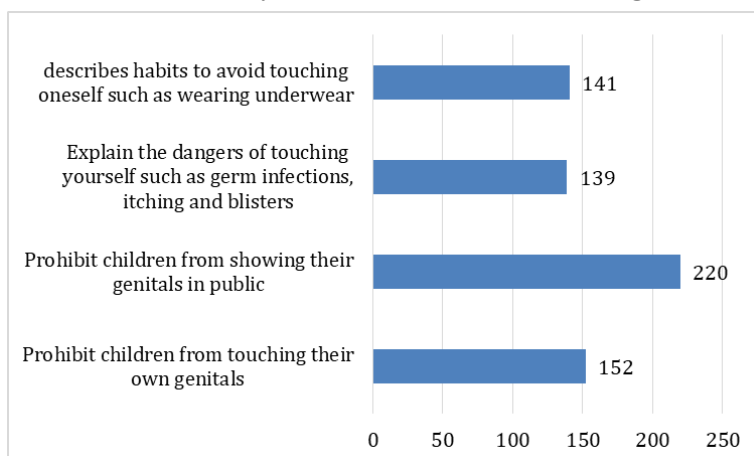
In early childhood education, teachers prioritize developing toileting skills, which includes guidance on restroom usage, hygiene practices, and considerations related to culture, religion, and gender. This holistic approach aims to support children's comfort and cleanliness in restroom use, reflecting a commitment to their overall development. By addressing practical aspects alongside cultural, religious, and gender-related considerations, educators ensure a comprehensive approach to toileting education that promotes proper hygiene and respects diverse backgrounds.

The experiences of early childhood educators in Ontario (ECEs) regarding sexuality development in children also reveal the occurrence of typical behaviours related to bodily functions and hygiene in early learning environments, such as behaviours observed during toilet routines (Balter et al. 2016). ECEs emphasize the importance of fostering children's self-knowledge, including toileting skills (Pratiwi et al. 2023). Strategies for parents to engage in sexuality education with their children from an early age, as suggested by a previous study, include initiating conversations about toileting, modelling proper hygiene practices, and discussing sexuality-related topics using accurate terminology throughout a child's development (Curtiss 2018; Rooks-Ellis et al. 2020). Additionally, UNESCO's key concept of culture, society, and human rights in sexuality education for children aged 5-8 emphasizes the importance of providing children with ample opportunities to practice modelled sexual hygiene behaviours and stresses the need for comprehensive strategies addressing various aspects of sexuality, including health, hygiene, boundaries, and privacy (Goldman 2013).

### Self-Touching

Studies conducted by developmental psychologists have observed and documented the prevalence of self-stimulatory behaviours among young children. Additionally, research in early childhood education has explored the role of such behaviours in children's development of bodily awareness and self-confidence. This suggests that in early childhood, children frequently engage in self-stimulation of their genitalia, which fosters their bodily self-assurance (Abelard and Dundon 2021; Biswas et al. 2020; Russell 2020).

**Table 2.** sexuality education in addressing self-touch behaviours activities



Understanding typical sexual behaviours in early childhood is crucial for educators and caregivers as it helps them create supportive environments that promote healthy development and address children's needs effectively. In early learning environments, such behaviours, including self-touching, are frequently observed by early childhood educators (Kenny et al. 2015). While this behaviour may seem concerning to some adults, it is considered common among young children and is a natural part of their exploration and understanding of their bodies.

Moreover, research on parental sexual communication self-efficacy with toddlers and young children suggests that educating caregivers about sexual development and body safety for children may involve addressing behaviours like self-touching (Ferguson et al. 2023; Malgosa et al. 2023). For instance, caregivers can engage in age-appropriate conversations with children about their bodies, teach them about privacy and personal boundaries, and provide guidance on appropriate behaviours. Additionally, caregivers can create environments where children feel comfortable asking questions and expressing concerns about their bodies, fostering open communication and trust.

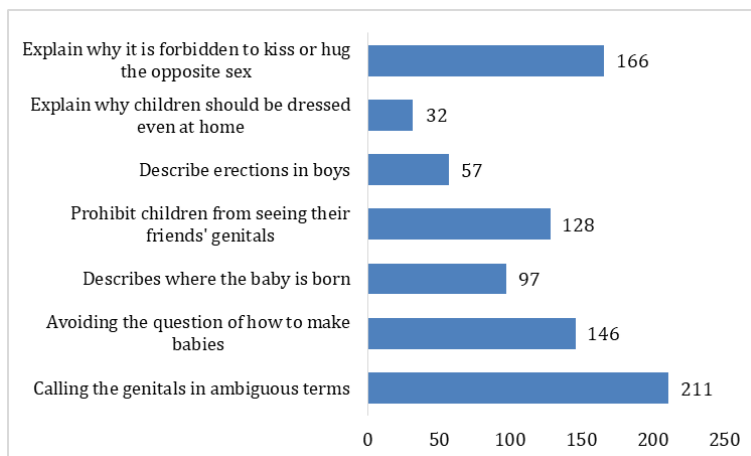
The self-touching in children corresponds to UNESCO key concepts in sexuality education, particularly those related to sexual development, behaviour, and relationships. Regarding sexual behaviour (UNESCO key concept 5), it is recognized that children are

naturally curious about their bodies and may explore them, which includes engaging in self-touching (Goldman 2013). The connection between self-touching in children and UNESCO key concept 4 on human development relates to body image and understanding pubertal, sexual, and reproductive anatomy and processes (Goldman 2013).

### Sexual Curiosity

In the early stages of development, children demonstrate a natural inclination to explore their surroundings, including their bodies and those of others. This exploration, which encompasses tactile, sensory, and visual experiences, is a fundamental aspect of early childhood development (World Health Organization 2020). Insights from developmental psychology underscore that such behaviours are typical and expected at this stage, as children seek to understand themselves and their environment (Dewey 2021). A child may observe or touch another child's genitals out of curiosity, aiming to comprehend differences, and similarities, or imitate adult behaviour. However, the impact of these actions on children's emotional development is heavily influenced by the responses of adults in their environment rather than the behaviours themselves. Adults must respond sensitively and appropriately, as their reactions shape children's understanding and emotional well-being.

**Table 3.** Sexuality education in discussing sexual curiosity



Exploring sexual curiosity in early childhood involves delicately addressing sensitive topics, and considering children's developmental stage and comprehension. Caregivers and educators employ several strategies for this purpose. Firstly, they may use ambiguous language for genitalia and avoid reproductive discussions, acknowledging curiosity while preserving innocence and promoting appropriate behavior. Secondly, establishing boundaries for interactions and explaining gender-specific societal norms helps children grasp appropriate conduct in various situations. Teachers must sensitively recognize and respond to children's behaviors, imparting lessons on bodily autonomy, boundaries, and modesty to foster self-respect and respect for others. Additionally, creating a safe and respectful environment is crucial, fostering open communication, trust, and mutual respect, laying the groundwork for healthy attitudes towards sexuality and relationships. Thus, teachers and caregivers play a dual role in educating and supporting children through this developmental phase. By providing accurate and age-appropriate sexuality education in schools, they can counter misinformation and ensure children acquire reliable knowledge, empowering them to explore their curiosity safely and knowledgeably.

Young infants possess an innate curiosity, making them susceptible to acquiring erroneous or inappropriate knowledge about sexuality from various sources such as media or peers (Holtzman and Sharpe 2014). Teachers can counteract misinformation and ensure that children acquire age-appropriate and reliable knowledge by providing truthful information within the confines of a school setting (McCartan et al. 2015). The inclusion of sexuality education in the school setting offers valuable opportunities for children to

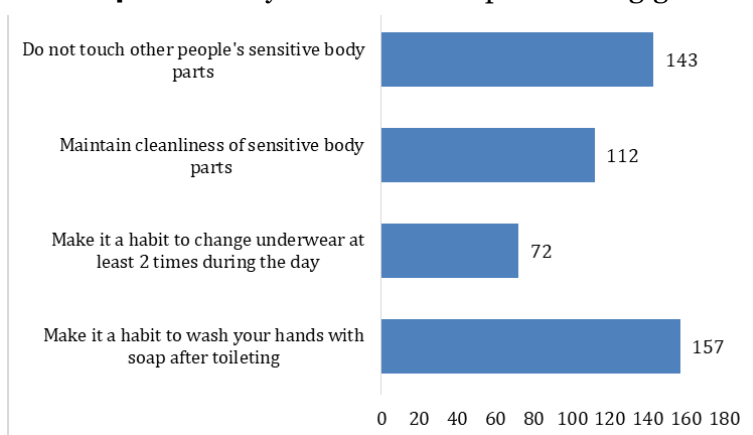
explore and question their bodies and those of individuals in their social environment, potentially benefiting their overall development (Walsh et al. 2015). This measure also has the potential to mitigate the social stigma and discomfort commonly associated with discussing matters related to human sexuality. Parents, teachers, and society at large to recognize that young children are already being exposed to sexual information through unauthorized means. In the context of sexuality education, omitting certain subjects when engaging with children may perpetuate the dissemination of misleading information and sources that pose risks to their well-being. As professionals operating within structured and formal institutions, teachers play a significant role in addressing this issue (Rudolph et al. 2018; Rudolph and Zimmer-Gembeck 2018). However, a prevailing issue persists in Indonesia due to the lack of a complete curriculum on sexuality education specifically tailored for young children (van Reeuwijk et al. 2023). This gap underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and age-appropriate sexuality education programs to be developed and implemented in educational settings.

The absence of a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum not only hinders educators' ability to provide consistent and accurate information but also exposes children to misinformation. Without standardized guidelines and materials, teachers may struggle to effectively address sensitive topics, resulting in gaps in children's understanding and potentially harmful misconceptions. Bridging this divide requires collaborative efforts from various stakeholders, including educational authorities, policymakers, and community leaders. Together, they must develop and implement a thorough and culturally sensitive sexuality education curriculum tailored to the needs and values of Indonesian children. This curriculum should include age-appropriate content, clear learning objectives, and supportive resources to empower educators in facilitating meaningful discussions and delivering accurate information.

### Health and Hygiene

Children begin learning about the significance of personal hygiene and overall health from an early age. In toddlerhood, they demonstrate a growing sense of independence and eagerness to learn self-care skills (Alias et al. 2023; Altaş 2022). These daily routines, such as cleaning the genital area while bathing or toileting, and dressing themselves, contribute to the development of healthy behaviours in their formative years. Hygiene education aims to instil consistent health practices that extend beyond childhood (World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund 2021). For example, teaching children to wash their hands before meals not only reduces the risk of illnesses in the short term but also establishes lifelong habits that promote overall well-being. By emphasizing the importance of hygiene from an early age, educators and caregivers lay the foundation for a lifetime of good health and wellness.

**Table 4.** Sexuality education in promoting genital health and hygiene



The significance of health and hygiene in early childhood cannot be overstated, as it forms the foundation for lifelong well-being (Sajaniemi et al. 2020). Daily activities like washing hands after toileting, changing underwear regularly, and maintaining cleanliness



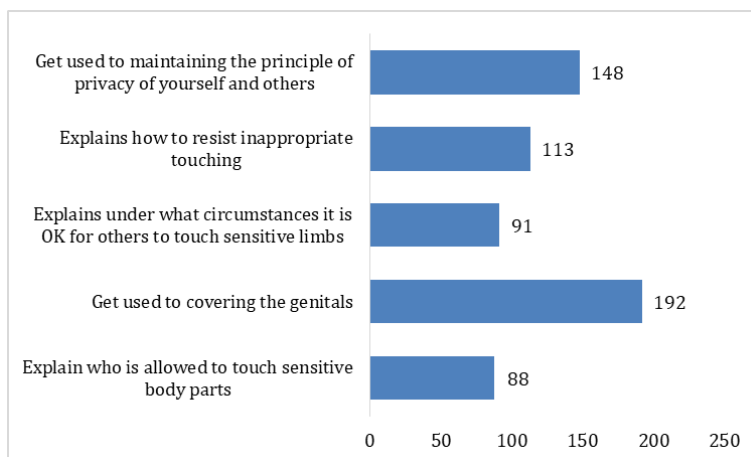
of sensitive body parts are crucial habits that not only promote cleanliness but also prevent infections and maintain overall health. In addition to these practices, teaching children to respect personal boundaries, including not touching others' sensitive body parts without consent, fosters respectful social interactions and contributes to their emotional well-being. Teachers play a vital role in cultivating bodily care knowledge and promoting feelings of cleanliness and well-being among children (Helmer et al. 2015). They can employ various strategies, such as incorporating hygiene lessons into daily routines, demonstrating proper cleaning techniques, and using age-appropriate resources to engage children in learning about hygiene practices.

This research results highlight the alignment between the UNESCO key concept of relationships and the study's focus on personal hygiene and respecting boundaries in daily interactions. The study, particularly in the section addressing families, partially examines the Guidance topic headings, learning objectives, and key ideas related to relationships for children aged 5–8. Additionally, the reference to Grade 3 curriculum standards, where students describe what a healthy person looks like, feels like and sounds like in various aspects of life, including connections to family, friends, and community, further reinforces the importance of relationships in promoting overall well-being (Goldman 2013).

### Sexual Abuse

The prevention of sexual abuse is an imperative undertaking that necessitates the active participation of both teachers and parents to protect children from harm. In addition, it is imperative to provide children with education regarding the various manifestations and potential risks associated with sexual abuse.

**Table 5.** sexuality education in preventing sexual harassment



The aims of sexual abuse prevention involve educating children about the potential occurrence of abuse while avoiding the creation of fear, affirming that they are not to blame for any abuse that may occur, highlighting the responsibility of adults in ensuring their safety and fostering attentiveness and proactive action in the event of possible abuse encounters (Walsh et al. 2015 2018). It is crucial to provide children with knowledge regarding the possibility of abuse, while simultaneously ensuring that they are not excessively burdened or frightened (Rudolph et al. 2018). Teachers play a vital role in educating children on how to protect themselves from potential harm either removing themselves from a situation or notifying a responsible adult nearby (Finkelhor 2019). They are tasked with teaching children to differentiate between appropriate, caring physical contact and harmful forms of touch. Successfully navigating this complex task requires creating a secure and inclusive environment that encourages discussions about personal boundaries, consent, and respect for bodily autonomy (Rudolph et al. 2018; Walsh et al. 2015).

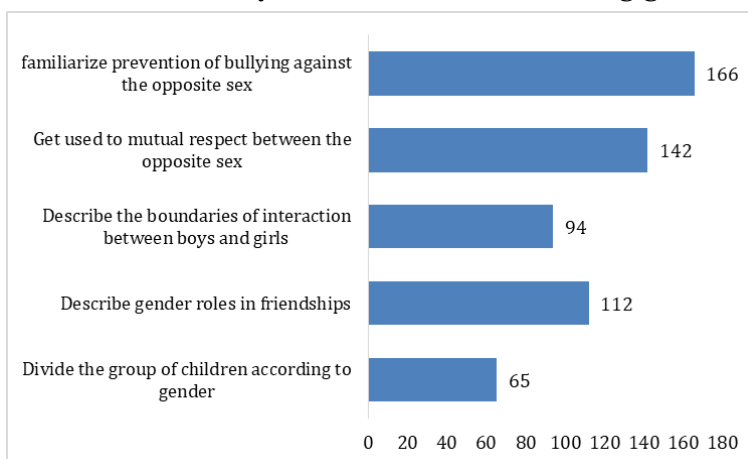
Preventing sexual abuse requires a collaborative effort involving teachers, parents, and children, with educators playing a crucial role in empowering individuals to recognize and respond to potential risks (Mathews and Collin-Vézina 2019). Themes including

explaining appropriate touch, promoting modesty, teaching resistance to inappropriate touching, and emphasizing privacy collectively work to raise awareness, set boundaries, and cultivate a safe environment. Educators aim to educate children about abuse without instilling fear, affirm their innocence, and teach proactive measures for self-protection. Providing children with knowledge, confidence, and strategies to discern appropriate touch, teachers help establish a secure and inclusive environment for respectful dialogue and safeguarding children's well-being.

### The Complexity of Gender Roles

The concept of gender is a complex and multidimensional subject that encompasses a range of factors, such as biological characteristics, individual self-perception, and societal expectations and norms. Upon the birth of a child, it is customary for individuals to inquire about the gender of the new born, posing the question, "Is the infant male or female?" The outcome is influenced by biological factors. Gender roles encompass the range of behaviours and expressions that are commonly associated with either masculinity or femininity.

**Table 6.** sexuality education in discussing gender roles



Cultural contexts often demonstrate rigid messaging, whether communicated verbally or non-verbally, imposing limitations. For instance, societal norms may allow girls to freely express emotions through crying, while boys are encouraged to adhere to standards of emotional resilience. Additionally, there is a societal inclination to encourage risk-taking in boys while urging caution in girls. Traditional gender roles are reflected in play preferences, with girls often drawn to dolls and boys to action figures or toy cars (Mayeza 2017).

The labelling of individuals who exhibit behaviours traditionally associated with the opposite gender reflects societal biases. Females engaging in typically masculine behaviours may be termed "tomboys," while males displaying feminine traits might be labelled derogatorily as "sissy" or "effeminate." Such labels often carry negative connotations and contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes (Rosen and Nofziger 2019). Children must understand the paramount importance of gender equality, recognizing the equal significance and potential for excellence in diverse endeavours among both girls and boys. Friendship between genders is possible, and it's crucial to acknowledge that individuals may not conform to stereotypical gender expectations.

This study emphasizes the vital importance of incorporating religious, sociocultural, and health-related values into the development of a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum. These values are fundamental in this educational domain, ensuring that children receive accurate information, are treated ethically, and are empowered to make informed decisions regarding their sexual health and overall well-being (Moghadam and Ganji 2019; Sanjakdar 2016). The collaborative endeavour is supported by the execution of a well-organized educational program that involves active participation from educators, parents, and community stakeholders. The main goal is to establish an

environment that fosters comprehensive sexual well-being among young children (Kurtuncu et al. 2015). The perspectives of Muslim educators provide useful insights for incorporating Islamic ideas into sexuality education, so assuring the congruence of the curriculum with religious convictions. The incorporation of these teachings has the potential to enhance students' comprehension and recognition of the religious significance attributed to them (Sanjakdar 2016).

The potential benefits of integrating and aligning activities through collaborative processes among entities are manifold. This approach involves the widespread distribution of comprehensive and ongoing sexual education through multiple avenues, including homes and educational institutions. The partnership between parents and educators plays a vital role in overcoming potential barriers in the realm of sexuality education (Rudolph et al. 2018). This relationship cultivates an inclusive atmosphere that facilitates children's unrestricted involvement in conversations regarding delicate subjects, devoid of any feelings of unease or embarrassment, so fostering an environment that encourages open expression and active engagement.

Several variables that contribute to parental resistance when it comes to delivering sexual education to their children. In the present context, the term "factors" incorporates religious and cultural norms, which may have detrimental effects on children and raise ethical concerns. The exhibited awareness of instructors signifies their acquaintance with the various obstacles and disputes that may ensue with the implementation of sexual education in the early stages of life. Misconceptions regarding the core and objectives of sexuality education are prevalent within the Muslim community. As a result, educators within the Muslim community have a significant opportunity to address and clarify these misconceptions. They can create a more favourable and supportive setting that is suitable for this particular instructional approach (Nadeem et al. 2021).

## CONCLUSION

This study elucidates the multifaceted responsibilities of early childhood educators in sexuality education, emphasizing a holistic approach to conveying sensitive knowledge. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping children's understanding of their bodies and relationships, covering aspects such as toileting, hygiene practices, and cultural considerations. They demonstrate proper hygiene techniques, promote modesty, and emphasize preventive habits like handwashing. Additionally, educators address self-touch behaviours, create a safe environment for discussing sexual curiosity, and promote genital health and hygiene. They work to prevent sexual harassment, challenge gender stereotypes, and foster inclusivity and equality. These findings underscore the importance of comprehensive sexual education in early childhood, highlighting the need for tailored curricula and collaborative partnerships between parents and teachers.

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