



*An Investigation on Moroccan Teachers' Attitudes about Sexuality Education in Moroccan Public
High Schools*

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Abstract

Whilst many people acknowledge the importance of education in a person's life and how it paves the way to a bright future, there is still a lot of debate and rejection surrounding the topic of sex or sexuality education. Currently, there is a debate regarding the implementation of sex education programs in schools mainly because it is thought to encourage early sexual activity and dispossess children of their innocence. In Muslim countries, such as Morocco, it is forbidden to have sexual relations outside wedlock, and talking about such things is considered taboo. However, no one can deny the increasing number of adolescents who are suffering from the horrific consequences of unprotected sex such as AIDS, HIV, Gonorrhoea, etc. With more and more people being at risk of these illnesses, the need for sex education has become immense as it improves one's skills to protect oneself and make informed decisions about one's health. Despite this great emphasis and importance of sex education, it is not part of the Moroccan educational system. This study aims to examine the attitudes of Moroccan Teachers about the effectiveness of sex education in Moroccan public high schools and the challenges that face its implementation.

Keywords: Sex, Sexuality, Sexual Education, Sexual Health, Attitude

Introduction

As children grow, they accumulate knowledge over the years about a variety of subjects to prepare them for the future. Children learn from parents, schools, life experiences, social media, what they watch, and other influences around them, and it can be either positive learning or negative learning. However, one subject is difficult to teach and have control over because of misunderstandings, lack of adequate knowledge, and publicity, which is Sex and sexuality education. Sex and sexuality education has always been debatable in conservative societies due to many dogmatic ideas, ignorance, and misunderstanding of the topic. Sex and sexuality education has become a taboo. However, sex is something natural, and because humanity is directed by culture, some societies believe that sexuality is something that should be freely enjoyed and practiced without barriers; whereas the vast majority believe that sexuality should be private and far from the public gaze. Therefore, it has been reduced and restricted by norms according to the understanding of each society to the topic.

Sex or sexuality education plays a vital role in developing and preparing young people to have a clear idea about the consequences of sexual relationships without precaution and the diseases transmitted by unprotected sexual intercourse such as HIV, STDs, unintended pregnancies, abandoned children, and many other negative effects and problems. Even though sex education is part of the western curriculum and students are already aware of such a topic, there is still a rejection and repudiation of the concept in several countries among them Morocco. Moroccan people still consider the notion of sexual education a shame and taboo. For instance, it is prohibited to discuss it with Parents or family members simply because they are reluctant to talk to their kids about sexuality-related issues as it makes them feel uncomfortable, or they do not have much knowledge about the matter. Consequently, young people are discouraged to ask their parents or close ones because the way we are raised about certain issues does not encourage us to dare or even think of asking. Consequently, children and adolescents are left with very little to no knowledge about their bodies, maturation, or other aspects of reproductive health. The present study focuses mainly on the attitudes of Moroccan teachers about the effectiveness of sex education in public high schools. The paper will first provide some background information about sex, sexuality, sexuality education, sexual health, and attitude. It will give the reader a brief account of some of the advantages of sex education, giving him/her an idea about its effectiveness and importance in changing people's lives, especially the youth.

Statement of the problem

Regardless of the importance of sex education and how it can contribute to enlightening educationalists, parents, civic society, and writers to better understand sex and sexuality education issues. As well as how to implement topics in Moroccan public high schools and more specifically how it can enable young people to acquire knowledge, skills, and values to make appropriate choices in their sexual behavior and thus experience a healthy sex life that is age-appropriate. Sex education is still neglected and not given much attention. Additionally, although sex education has proven to be effective in Western countries, it is still not implemented as a school curriculum in many countries including Morocco. The fact that children and adolescents do not possess convenient and adequate knowledge concerning sexuality makes them vulnerable to a wide range of complications and serious social phenomena.

Research questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

- what is the importance of sex education?
- what is your attitude about providing high school students with sex education?
- Why implementing sex education in schools is important?
- What are the challenges that might face the implementation of sexuality education in schools?
- What are the challenges and obstacles behind teaching and informing students about sex education?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to find out the barriers that withhold some, if not most, of us from recognizing the immense role that sex education plays in terms of the development and protection of young people. The first step towards attaining this goal is to understand what people think of the matter. In this respect, I will be examining the views and attitudes of Moroccan teachers in public high schools toward sex education. Therefore, understanding their points of view as educators and facilitators and raising awareness about how such topics can strongly contribute to the spread of knowledge concerning sexuality in a much faster and broader fashion as well as recognizing the obstacles facing the implementation of sexuality education in Moroccan public high schools.

Significance of the Study

The topic of sex education has been refused and rejected for a long time in our society, especially in our educational system and schools, and it is about time to recognize its importance and overcome the cultural taboos surrounding it. And give the matter a new accurate interpretation and importance, which is one of the objectives of this study to contribute to the development and protection of our society and our children.

I. Review of literature

1. Definition of key concepts

In carrying out this review, it is of great necessity to understand the key concepts used, the following are some terms that are relevant to the discussion of sex education. Many

people use the concepts of sex education, sexual education, and sexuality education interchangeably. However, understanding each concept is of great importance.

1.1 Sex:

To begin with, sex refers to the physical or physiological differences between males and females, including both primary sex characteristics (the reproductive system) and secondary characteristics such as height and muscularity. In other words, sex is a purely biological concept that states the physical differences between a male and a female.

1.2 Sexuality:

Sexuality, on the other hand, is not biological. Sexuality describes the whole way a person goes about expressing himself or herself as a sexual being. According to the World Health Organization [WHO] (2006),

Sexuality is a fundamental part of being human. a central aspect of being human throughout life (that) encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.

That is to say, Sexuality includes our gender identity, gender roles, our sexual orientation, sexual experiences, thoughts, ideas, and fantasies, we experience intimacy, touch, love, compassion, joy, and sorrow, and most importantly how we feel about our bodies; that is to say, the body image.

1.3 Sexuality education:

Sex and sexuality education is a broad term used to describe education about human sexual anatomy, sexual reproduction, sexual intercourse, and other aspects of human sexual behavior. Sex education has been given various definitions by various schools of thought. For instance, AHI (2003) described sex education as “*a planned process of education that fosters the acquisition of factual information, the formation of positive attitudes, beliefs, and values as well as the development of skills to cope with the biological, psychological, socio-cultural and spiritual aspects of human sexuality.*” That is, learning about the anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry of the sexual response system which determines identity, orientations, thoughts, and feelings as influenced by values beliefs, ethics, and moral concerns. It is the interactive

relationship of these dimensions that describes an individual's total sexuality (SIECUS, 1995). Sex education aims to develop and strengthen the ability of children and young people to make conscious, satisfying, healthy, and respectful choices regarding relationships, sexuality, and physical health. Moreover, sexuality education is also defined by WHO (2010) as "*Learning about the cognitive, emotional, social, interactive and physical aspects of sexuality.*" It begins early in childhood and forges ahead through adolescence and adulthood. It provides the necessary knowledge, skills and values to have secure, meaningful relationships and to make informed decisions concerning one's sexual and reproductive health. Sex or sexuality education should occur throughout a student's grade level, with information appropriate to students' development and cultural background. It should include information about puberty and reproduction, abstinence, contraception and condoms, relationships, sexual violence prevention, body image, gender identity, and sexual orientation. It should be taught by trained teachers. Sexuality education should be informed by evidence of what works best to prevent unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and any other social issues. Sex education should treat sexual development as a normal, natural part of human development.

1.4 Sexual Health

Sexual health is a term that encompasses the social, psychological, physical, and emotional side of sexual human interactions. According to the World Health Organization:

Sexual health is a state of physical, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

That is, sexual health entails having good sexual health and avoiding transmitted infections. Moreover, ASHA defines sexual health as "*the ability to embrace and enjoy our sexuality throughout our lives. It is an important part of our physical and emotional health.*" For her, being sexually healthy means understanding that sexuality is a natural part of life and involves more than sexual behavior, recognizing and respecting the sexual rights we all share, having access to sexual health information, education, and care, and making an effort to prevent unintended

pregnancies and seeking care and treatment when needed, being able to experience sexual pleasure, satisfaction, and intimacy when desired, and finally being able to communicate about sexual health with others including sexual partners and healthcare providers. From this, we can say that for good sexual health, education on the subject matter is necessary.

1.5 Attitude

An attitude is *"a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioral tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols"*. An attitude of an individual is a complex of feelings or mental dispositions that influence his/ her behavior. It is in general a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor.

2. Importance of Sex Education

Sexuality education has many positive impacts among which the following:

- Avoid negative health consequences, and communicate about sexuality and sexual health.
- Delay sex until they are ready.
- Understand healthy and unhealthy relationships,
- Understand, value, and feel autonomy over their bodies
- Respect others' right to bodily autonomy
- Show dignity and respect for all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity...

All these mentioned ideas aim to develop and strengthen the ability of children, and young people to make conscious, satisfying, healthy, and respectful choices regarding relationships, sexuality, and physical health that can be achieved only through sex education.

3. Approaches to sexuality education

Sex and sexuality education has been studied from two major approaches which are currently in use: an abstinence-based approach to sex education (Collins, C., Alagiri, P. and Summers, T., (2002), A comprehensive approach to sex education (Hauser, and Bridges (2014)). On one hand, an abstinence-based approach to sex education focuses on teaching young people

that abstaining from sex until marriage is the best means of ensuring that they avoid infection with HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancy.

On the other hand, a comprehensive approach to sex education. It is defined by UNESCO (2009) as “*an age-appropriate, culturally relevant approach to teaching about sexuality and relationships by providing scientifically accurate, realistic, non-judgmental information*” (p.2).it aims at helping young people achieve accurate knowledge about all matters related to sexuality, nurturing their positive attitudes and values, and developing multiple abilities such as critical thinking and communication skills. It encompasses plenty of issues associated with sexuality in its physical biological, emotional, and social aspects. It perceives and acknowledges all individuals as sexual beings and goes beyond the prevention of disease or pregnancy.

II. Analysis of the findings

This chapter aims to analyze and interpret the qualitative and quantitative data we collected concerning Moroccan teachers’ attitudes toward sex education. This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section is about the profiles of the respondents while the second is about Moroccan teachers’ perceptions and attitudes toward sex education. The third section will deal with the importance of sex education in decreasing and eliminating some social phenomena. The fourth and final section will be about the challenges behind teaching and informing students about sex education.

1. Respondent’s profiles

Since the study focuses on teachers’ perception of sexual education implementation, our respondents are equally chosen 50 females and 50 males teaching in public high schools from different cities in Morocco aged between 25 and 45+ as the following chart illustrates:

Respondents Demographics		
	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	50%
	Female	50%
	Total	100%

Age	20-25	25%
	25-30	28%
	30-35	20%
	35-40	12%
	40-45	10%
	45+	5%
	Total	100%

Additionally, it is of great importance to address each research question individually. In this respect, my first research question is ‘should sex education be provided to students in high schools?’

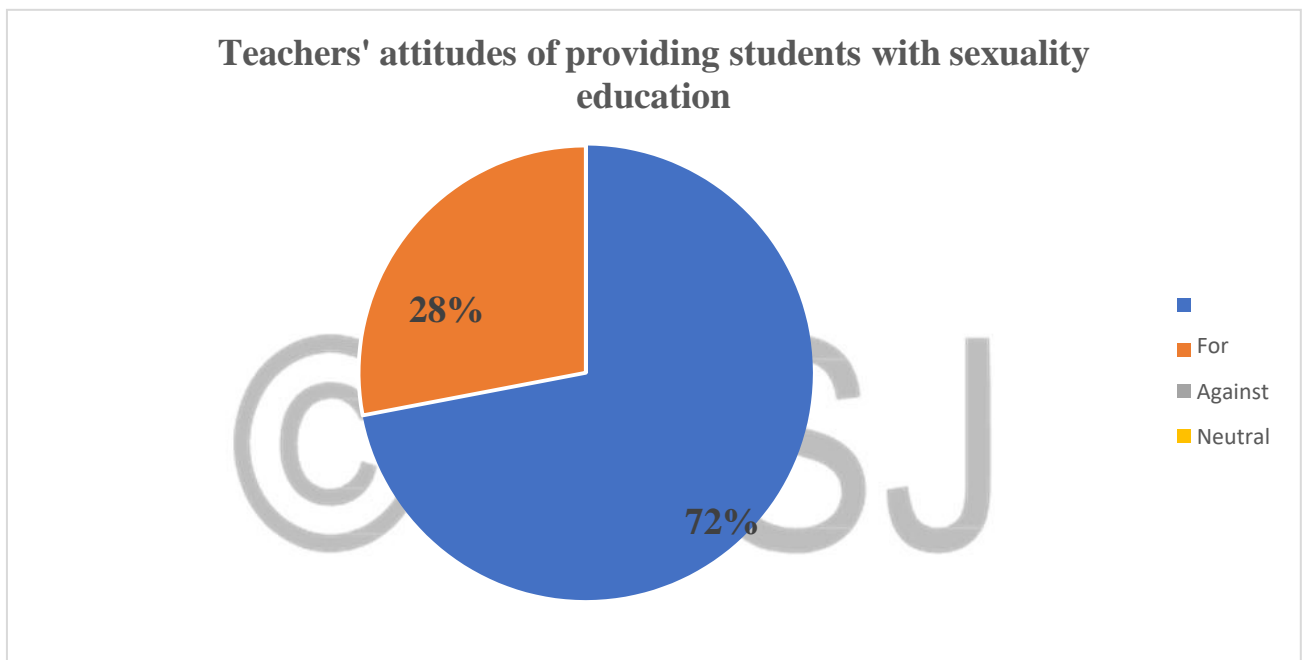
Question N°1: Do you think that sexual education is effective and important?

The question aimed at determining the views of teachers about the importance of sex education in one’s life. According to respondents, 82% reported that sex education is important, and stressed the idea that the more we are aware of sex education the more we get familiar with how to protect ourselves and our children from many social problems. In other words, sex education is effective because it will help decrease certain phenomena like unwanted pregnancies, orphanages, prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases, and other serious complications. However, the findings also revealed that a few respondents believe that sex education is not effective and important as the chart demonstrates, 15% did not agree. As for a smaller number, they are neutral neither with nor against as they only represent 5%. The chart below illustrates this clearly:

Effectiveness of sexuality education	
Yes	82%
No	13%
Neutral	5%
Total	100%

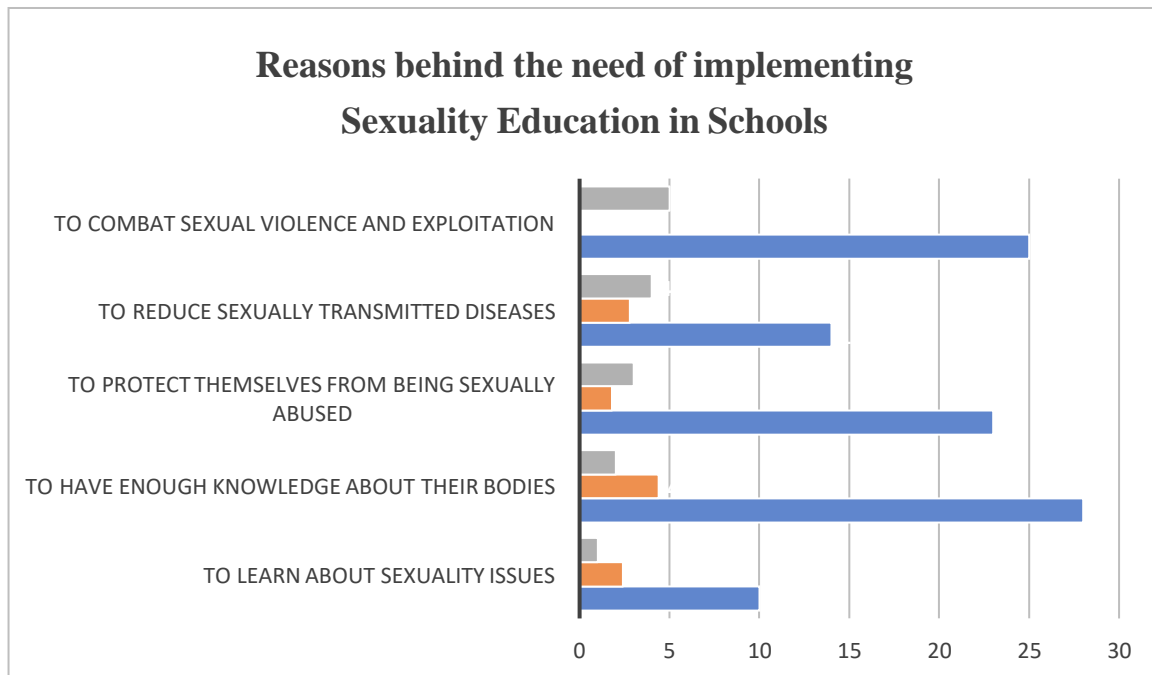
Question N°2: what is your attitude about providing high school students with sexual education?

The purpose of this question is to collect respondents' attitudes about sexuality education. Surprisingly, most of the teachers are aware of sex education's importance as (72%) are for providing students with such matters. While (28%) are against and believe that students are already aware of sexuality education and they don't need it, especially with the highspread of internet access or simply they can ask their parents results are shown:



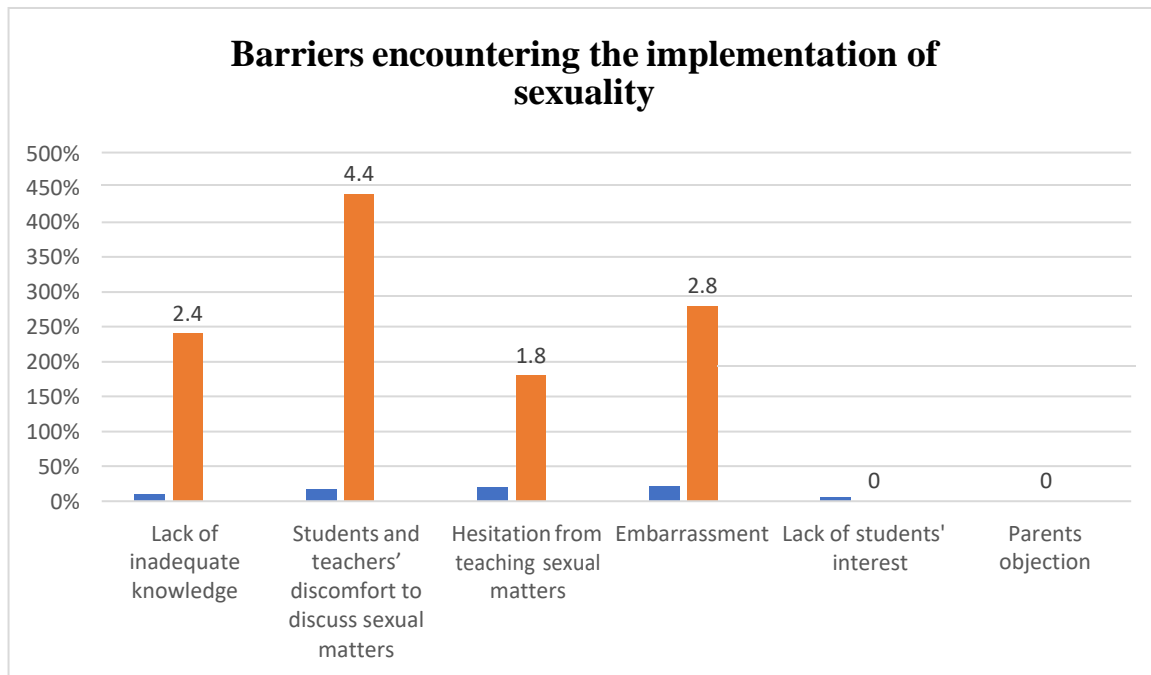
Question N°3: Why implementing sex education in schools is important?

This question is meant to understand what are the main reasons behind implementing sex education in Moroccan public high schools. For instance, there are multiple reasons behind this among which we have to have enough knowledge about their bodies which represents 28% of respondents' choices. Followed by 25% of respondents who opt for combating sexual violence and exploitation. If students are aware and have information about their bodies they will certainly protect themselves from any harm or being sexually abused as it represents 23%. Followed by 14% who confirmed that having sexuality education recognition will minimize sexually transmitted diseases. Finally, 10% of respondents stated that if sexuality education is implemented in schools, they will learn about sexuality matters.



Question N°4: What are the challenges that might face the implementation of sexuality education in schools?

This question is meant to recognize the challenges and barriers that may hinder or reject the implementation of sex education in Moroccan public high schools. Some believe that this topic is considered taboo and against our religion, that's why parents won't accept that their students learn about sexuality, which represents 25%. This issue has also been linked to shame for some they relate it to embarrassment 22% while others 20% link it to hesitation to teach sexual matters. On the other side, the study shows that 17% indicated that discussing sexual matters may cause a kind of discomfort for both teachers and students. A 10% of teachers' participants also revealed that lack of inadequate knowledge is among the main obstacles behind implementing sexuality education in schools. Lastly, only 6% consider that the lack of students' interest is one of the reasons behind not implementing sexuality education in Moroccan public high schools. Results are presented in the following figure:



Conclusion

To conclude, Moroccan public Teachers have shown a positive attitude toward the sexuality education importance. The results were satisfactory. They have improved that sex education is very effective. Even though some were reluctant and rejected the idea. Evidently, despite its vague importance in our society, such a type of education is still uncovered in the Moroccan educational system and is still considered taboo in our society. Moreover, our society and children need such education to reduce many social problems and exploitation of the agents of tomorrow. For this purpose, gaining knowledge about sexuality will bring up well-educated, knowledgeable, and informed students who clearly understand themselves and their bodies as well as powerful to confront unwanted social issues like rape, harassment, abandoned children, and infections. This research could be a declaration for educators and policymakers to delve into it and take into account to provide the future generation with the necessary information as well providing trainee teachers and specialists in the field.

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