

The study of early childhood sexual education in Hangzhou

Yu Cai^{1,*}

¹School of Teacher Education, Lishui University, No.1, Xueyuan Road, Baiyun Street, Lishui, China

Abstract. In recent years, the rise in sexual assault cases has led to increased emphasis on sex education. China has incorporated it into its legal framework to prevent assault among minors. This article delves into sex education through an interview with a Hangzhou kindergarten teacher, addressing two key questions: How is sex education implemented in Hangzhou kindergartens, and what challenges do educators face? The interview data is analyzed concerning content, methods, and influencing factors. The kindergarten employs a segmented approach with limited depth and avoids sensitive topics. A major challenge in Chinese sex education is the scarcity of resources compared to countries like the UK, the US, and Finland. Domestic kindergartens mainly use picture books, while international ones employ multimedia, peer education, and interactive tools with age-appropriate instruction. The article advocates enriching China's sex education with diversity and scientific rigor, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive training and better parent-teacher communication to enhance effectiveness.

1 Introduction

In recent years, due to the continuous development of network technology, the number of sexual assault cases reported by society is increasing year by year. And people's discussion and attention to the topic of sex education is also increasing. On October 17, 2020, the thirteenth session of the standing committee of the National People's Congress meeting the second revision of the law of the People's Republic of China on minors' protection for sex education had such rules: "schools, kindergartens shall for minors for their age of sex education, improve minors to prevent sexual assault, sexual harassment self-protection consciousness and ability." In the 26th of the requirements, "kindergarten should do well in childcare, education, follow the law of children's physical and mental development, the implementation of enlightenment education, promote children in physical, intellectual, moral and other harmonious development [1]. "It can be seen that the country attaches great importance to it. Ruan Fangfang, a famous expert in sex education, once said." The key period of sex education is early childhood (3-6 years old). Under the influence of the surrounding environment, various ideas about things gradually form, including sexual concepts, sexual attitudes, and sexual moral standards [2]. "Similarly, the United Nations International Technical Guidelines for Sexual Education states that children can receive and need sex education from after birth. There is no question of "too early" in child sex education, but only the question of "whether it is suitable for the age group". It is very important to enable children to have the ability to talk about and understand their bodies, feelings, and relationships from a very young age. It can help children master the methods of body understanding, privacy protection, self-

protection, and other aspects, and improve children's awareness and ability to self-protect [3]. The "Kindergarten Education Guidelines" also clearly pointed out: "to closely combine children's life and activities to self-protect, health care education, improve children's self-protection ability [4]." Many laws and regulations in China stipulate that kindergartens are obliged to carry out sex education-related courses.

After reviewing the literature, it was found that sex education curricula were made compulsory for kindergartens in Sweden, England, Finland, and other Western countries. In Sweden, the success of sex education is inseparable from the lively and diverse ways they adopt. In the school "sex education" curricula, teachers mostly adopt heuristic, participatory, and game teaching methods. Learn better about your body structure in the game interaction. In the UK, there is popular "peer education", which uses the influence of friends, through discussions, games, storytelling, knowledge contests, multiple communication carriers and physical models, and body structure [5]. In Finland, comprehensive sex education (Comprehensive sex education) is implemented, and sex education begins at the age of 4. Teachers also have abundant sex education activities in kindergartens. For example, a group of kindergarten children sit in a circle and the teacher looks through a picture book. The page contains hugs of animals such as bears and crocodiles. The teacher asked the children to think about why the bear and the crocodile hug, and to share the feeling of being hugged by the person they like. Classes like this are designed to make children distinguish between loving and malicious hugs. Other early courses have focused on physical awareness. For example, toddlers draw the bodies of boys and girls, tell stories of friends bathing together, and discuss who likes bathing and who doesn't. By the age of 7, students

* Corresponding author: karry7@ldy.edu.rs

should be able to correctly name the body parts, including the genitalia. They also understand different types of families, what good friends are, and the baby growing in the mother's womb [6].

In a word, Western countries have various methods of sex education for children, paying attention to the use of multimedia, radio, Internet, books, and other carriers to carry out situations, communication, and cooperation. And they both have an education system that suits their own country.

However, under the influence of traditional ideas and the environment, China's preschool sex education is still in the initial stage and the early stage of exploration [7]. Sex education in China was opened too late. It was not until 1963, at the National Health Science and Technology Planning Conference, that Zhou Enlai emphasized the importance of sex education, and the cause of sex education in China began to be gradually carried out [8]. Every kindergarten teacher in China varies in their understanding, acceptance, and teaching skills related to sex education [9,10]. Moreover, Chinese teachers typically haven't received systematic training in sex education. As a result, the sex education courses offered in schools often devolve into simple introductions and imparting of basic sexual knowledge, lacking proper guidance and scientific education. There is a serious misunderstanding in the treatment of young children. The method of offering sex education courses for kindergarten teachers is relatively simple and has poor popularization. In this context, the investigation and research are carried out with (1) How Hangzhou kindergarten teachers implement sex education and (2) What are the difficulties and experiences that Hangzhou kindergarten teachers face in the process of implementing sex education as the two questions as the core.

2 Method

This research utilizes the interview method, conducting face-to-face interviews with active kindergarten teachers in Hangzhou. The interviews encompass various aspects, beginning with the collection of basic information about the teachers, including their age and teaching experience. Additionally, foundational information about the kindergarten itself is gathered.

Further inquiries focus on the specifics of sex education courses, encompassing details such as the frequency and duration of these courses, the teachers' prior experience in delivering sex education, the employed teaching methodologies, collaboration with other school departments, and the educational content tailored for different age groups.

The overarching goal of this study is to obtain an intricate understanding of the strategies employed by kindergarten teachers in Hangzhou for disseminating sex education. Subsequently, the content of the interviews is documented, data is consolidated, and rigorous discussions and analyses are carried out to reconstruct the nuances of course content, teaching methodologies, and the contributing factors at play. Ultimately, the

research findings are summarized and conclusions are drawn.

3 The analysis of the course content

Q: Since the class has mixed-age students, do educators adapt teaching content for children of different ages, or is it generally the same for all?

A: In the current kindergarten, sex education isn't a widespread course, so both younger and older children seem to have a similar understanding of this topic. Interestingly, the mixed-age dynamic might be beneficial compared to parallel age groups because in mixed-age classes, a child might know some classmates already while others may be less familiar. In this context, the teacher mentioned that the content can be relatively straightforward.

Q: Now, let's delve into the specific content of the sex education course. What topics are taught to the children?

A: The emphasis is on explaining "how children come into the world," but contemporary sex education might focus more on topics like "not casually hugging others." Different kindergartens may have varying emphases. The primary focus is on the origin of life and includes some basic understanding of the body's structure. Every kindergarten covers body structure to some extent. It's discussed in terms of knowing their bodies and having hands and feet, but rarely mentioning genitalia. It's quite basic, mostly emphasizing that certain private areas should not be touched by others. It's not as detailed as, say, human anatomy; it's more like cartoon characters, especially on the wall charts.

This interview delves into the experiences of a Hangzhou kindergarten teacher responsible for instructing a mixed-age class within a sex education program. The outcomes shed light on the kindergarten's predominant approach to sex education, characterized by fragmented teaching that revolves around three core themes: 'the origin of life,' 'body structure,' and 'personal safety.' Regrettably, various factors contribute to a limited depth of knowledge imparted to the children, with a tendency to avoid discussing private matters. This approach, lacking a structured framework, fails to cater to the distinct requirements of children across different age groups.

This underscores a notable challenge in domestic sex education—a dearth of specialized resources tailored for preschool-level sex education, which poses difficulties for teachers seeking relevant reference materials. Conversely, foreign countries have advanced preschool sex education programs. For instance, in the UK, sex education becomes mandatory at the age of 5, accompanied by a rich array of textbooks and teaching materials catering to children of diverse ages, ensuring comprehensive coverage. The United States offers a more comprehensive curriculum, encompassing topics such as fertility, gender distinctions, personal hygiene, and sexual ethics. Finland boasts nearly three decades of experience in sex education, continuously enhancing its content, and seamlessly integrating it into the curricula,

setting a global benchmark for excellence in sex education.

4 The analysis of the teaching method

Q: Could the educator describe how the course was initially introduced and what the approach is?

A: From what has been learned, the kindergarten primarily uses picture books. Children seem to gravitate towards the library area to explore relevant materials. So, based on this, a related book is selected and the children are engaged with it to help them understand the relevant concepts. It's not a very in-depth approach, and it often revolves around the content of the picture book. For example, topics like "How did one come into this world?" are discussed. The primary reference is "Williams Moving Forward," with a focus on this picture book. Occasionally, "The Story of Chicken" and "The Story of Breast" might be used.

Q: So, is it mainly centered around these three books or illustrations?

A: Yes, primarily, the content revolves around these three books.

Through these interviews, it becomes strikingly evident that domestic kindergartens overwhelmingly rely on picture books as their primary vehicle for imparting sexual education. This approach remains predominantly confined to the confines of these picture book courses, with limited diversity in teaching methodologies. Although kindergartens make efforts to incorporate sex education into children's daily lives, they often do so through a single teaching method, lacking a comprehensive educational framework. Moreover, due to the limited exposure of Chinese teachers to formal sex education training, current programs tend to involve simplified knowledge presentations and indoctrination, lacking the guidance and scientific-pedagogical methods needed. There are significant misconceptions when dealing with children, falling far short of providing them with the comprehensive sexual knowledge they require.

In stark contrast, foreign kindergartens employ a wide array of teaching methods. For instance, Singapore has introduced multimedia sexual education textbooks and developed a plethora of sexual education programs for teachers to select from, with an emphasis on age-appropriate control of sexual behaviors and knowledge transmission. In the UK, the highly popular "peer education" method leverages peer influence through activities like games, storytelling, knowledge contests, and in-class discussions. These innovative approaches, combined with a variety of teaching tools and anatomical models, make sexual education both engaging and efficient, nurturing curiosity and enhancing knowledge retention. Furthermore, sex education is seamlessly integrated into daily life, picture book teaching, game-based instruction, and collaboration with families.

In summary, it is evident that domestic sex education in China needs to embrace greater diversity and scientific rigor to address the diverse needs of children effectively. Valuable lessons can be drawn from successful international experiences to improve sex

education in China, ensuring that children receive comprehensive and well-rounded knowledge, better equipping them for the complexities of their future lives.

5 The analysis of factors that affect curricula implementation

Q: What difficulties are encountered when conducting this kind of course?

A: Mainly, it's related to parents. Parents also hope that educators can carry out this kind of activity. However, the content is found to be somewhat basic. So, the primary focus is on personalized education, avoiding delivering the same content to the entire class. On the other hand, communication with parents also takes place. For instance, if a child has recently faced certain issues, educators can appropriately show parents some relevant content information, and methods are provided. In reality, it's more of a personalized education approach or involves parents because they have a better understanding of the situation.

Q: Besides parents, are there any other difficulties?

A: Books pose a significant problem. For example, today educators came across a book titled "Dear Baby." While the picture book is new, its content is quite shallow and cannot address the issues faced by children. This is believed to be a more significant challenge. It's also related to individual educators, especially young educators who may feel somewhat uncomfortable.

Q: Are there any other notable difficulties aside from these?

A: Primarily, it's parents and the challenge of finding suitable materials. Educators are limited to using picture books. If anatomical and physiological images were to be used, they might become too advanced, and classroom organization would be challenging. Additionally, educators, both during their university education and work experience, haven't received relevant education in this field. Their education has mainly focused on theoretical knowledge, without covering these aspects, resulting in a lack of knowledge.

Q: So, educators didn't receive specific training before offering this course, and educators organized it themselves?

A: Yes, that's correct. Educators had to find the resources on their own.

Several factors significantly impact the implementation of a sex education curriculum in preschools:

Divergent Teacher Perspectives: While a majority of preschool teachers acknowledge the importance of sex education, some may find it challenging to approach the subject. They may avoid the topic, deeming it unnecessary for kindergarten-aged children, assuming that not all children are interested in these matters. Furthermore, the lack of formal training and comprehensive knowledge among most teachers limits their capacity to teach effectively.

Parental Attitudes: The prevailing attitudes of parents towards sex education courses often lack enthusiasm. Interviews suggest that only a minority of parents

actively advocate for teachers to conduct sex education courses. Due to conservative viewpoints, kindergartens sometimes reduce the frequency of such classes or provide unilateral responses to children's questions. This, in turn, limits opportunities for comprehensive education.

Limited Educational Resources: The scarcity of educational materials related to sex education poses a significant challenge. Resources such as picture books, videos, models, and teaching materials in this domain are in short supply domestically. This scarcity hampers kindergarten teachers' efforts to find suitable reference materials and diversify their teaching methods. Moreover, it impacts their ability to offer a well-rounded sex education curriculum.

Lack of Comprehensive Teacher Training: Another noteworthy challenge is the absence of comprehensive teacher training in sex education. Preschool teachers typically receive theoretical knowledge but lack practical training, making it difficult for them to navigate the complex landscape of sex education effectively.

To address these issues, it's crucial to invest in comprehensive teacher training, provide access to diverse educational resources, and encourage open dialogues with parents about the importance of sex education in early childhood development.

6 Conclusion

In recent years, the increasing prevalence of sexual assault cases has prompted a growing societal focus on sex education. China, recognizing its importance, has incorporated sex education into its legal framework, emphasizing its role in preventing sexual assault and fostering self-protection among minors. Similarly, international guidelines, such as those from the United Nations, advocate for early-age sex education, stressing the importance of age-appropriate content. Western countries like Sweden, the UK, and Finland have implemented diverse and interactive methods in their sex education curricula, tailored to children's developmental stages and utilizing multimedia and various teaching approaches. Overall, most of the Western nations prioritize sex education as a vital aspect of children's development. China's early childhood sex education remains at an exploratory stage due to traditional influences, limited systematic teacher training, and a delayed start in addressing the topic, with a significant need for improved guidance and scientific education in this area.

In this context, this article investigates the implementation of a sex education curriculum by interviewing a teacher from a provincial-level kindergarten in Hangzhou, China. The study addresses two main questions: 1. How do kindergarten teachers in Hangzhou implement sex education curricula? 2. What challenges and experiences do these teachers encounter during the implementation of sex education? After organizing the interview data, the article analyzes the sex education curricula in terms of its methods, content, and the factors influencing its implementation.

This interview discusses a Hangzhou kindergarten teacher's experiences in sex education.

In terms of the course content, the kindergarten uses a fragmented approach with three core themes but lacks depth and avoids private topics. The main challenge in Chinese sex education is the lack of resources for preschool-level education. In contrast, foreign countries like the UK, the US, and Finland have advanced and comprehensive preschool sex education programs, setting global benchmarks for excellence.

From the course method, the content discusses the stark differences between domestic and foreign approaches to sexual education in kindergartens. Domestic kindergartens primarily rely on picture books with limited teaching methods, while foreign kindergartens employ diverse and innovative approaches, including multimedia textbooks, peer education, and interactive tools. The foreign methods emphasize age-appropriate education and integration into daily life. The conclusion suggests that China's sex education should adopt greater diversity and scientific rigor by learning from successful international experiences to provide children with comprehensive knowledge for their future lives. In terms of the other influencing factors, challenges in preschool sex education: 1. Teachers lack of training, impacting effectiveness. 2. Parental conservatism limits class quality and frequency. 3. Shortage of teaching materials hampers curricula. 4. Teachers need practical training for effective teaching. Solutions: Comprehensive teacher training, diverse resources, and parent communication are vital.

Due to the limited diffusion of early childhood sexual education programs within the various kindergartens of Hangzhou, this article predominantly adopts an interview-based approach, featuring an educator experienced in delivering sexual education courses. It is essential to note that this individual's perspective does not necessarily represent the consensus of all stakeholders.

In the foreseeable future, it is our aspiration that Chinese kindergartens will place a heightened emphasis on pre-primary sexual education, aiming to refine and diversify the curricula. In circumstances permitting, the development of culturally tailored kindergarten-level sexual education curricula in alignment with the unique context of China remains a pivotal objective.

References

1. LoveMatters, at last! "Sex education" has been written into the Adult Protection Act, but is that enough? (2020), Available online at: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1681035421041381438&wfr=spider&for=pc>.
2. Y. Qiu, Discussion on early childhood sex education, The first Kindergarten in Hukou County, Jiangxi Province, Phd thesis, Jiangxi, (2019).
3. Pre-school service platform, Kindergarten sex education small class: start from understanding and protecting our "little secret" (2020), Available online

at:https://www.360kuai.com/pc/9d3b56f23eb0b5ac5?cota=3&kuai_so=1&tj_url=so_rec&sign=360_57c3bbd1&refer_scene=so_1.

4. Lovelife, What should the kindergarten child sex education learn? Research group of child sex education of Beijing Normal University (2020), Available online at: <https://www.bilibili.com/read/cv8293030/>.
5. G. Sun, Foreign mode of sex puberty education and its enlightenment to adolescent sex education in China, Phd thesis, Hengshui, (2012).
6. O. Kontula, The evolution of sex education and students' sexual knowledge in Finland in the 2000s, SE, Phd thesis, England and Wales, (2010).
7. Southern Weekend, Behind the controversial sex education books: What kind of sex education do we need? (2017), Available online at: <http://www.infzm.com/contents/123380>.
8. N. Xie, Research on the implementation status of sex education in preschool children, School of Educational Science and Research, Northwest Normal University, Phd thesis, Lanzhou, (2003).
9. J. Li, W. Liu, Current Status of Kindergarten Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Skills in Sex Education and Teacher Training Recommendations, Phd thesis, Jiangsu, (2022).
10. S. Liu, Research on Kindergarten Sexual Education Activities, Phd thesis, Changchun, (2020).