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**Teaching Sexuality Education in Secondary Schools of Uganda and its Implications: A Qualitative Assessment of the Curriculum**

By

<sup>1</sup>Judith Atuhaire, <sup>2</sup>Dr Viola Nilah Nyakato and <sup>3</sup>Dr Clemencia Neema Murembe

<sup>1\*</sup>Judith Atuhaire (MA), Student Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies (FIS), Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) Uganda. P. O. Box 1410, Mbarara

Email: [jodynamara@gmail.com](mailto:jodynamara@gmail.com), Tel: +256-758740018

<sup>2</sup>Dr Viola Nilah Nyakato, (PhD), [vnyakato@must.ac.ug](mailto:vnyakato@must.ac.ug) Tel: +256-772982535

<sup>3</sup>Dr Clemencia Neema Murembe (PhD), [neemamurembe2@gmail.com](mailto:neemamurembe2@gmail.com) Tel: +256-772391617  
Lecturer, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies (FIS), University of Science and Technology (MUST) Uganda. P. O. Box 1410, Mbarara

\*For correspondence [jodynamara@gmail.com](mailto:jodynamara@gmail.com) +256-758740018

**Abstract**

This study assesses the performance of the sexuality Education (SE) curriculum used by secondary schools to understand why sexual challenges have persisted amongst adolescents undergoing this curriculum. A qualitative study was carried out within 6 schools purposively selected from Mbarara Municipality on a sample of 164 participants. The sample was composed of students aged 12-17 years, their teachers, head teachers and municipal education officers. We conducted two focus group discussions with students while a one-to-one in-depth interview was held with each of the other participants. We transcribed and analysed data through thematic coding and major themes evolved as:- 1. Schools have insisted on using the abstinence approach. 2. The curriculum aims at instilling fear, shame, and guilt in relation to sexuality. 3. There is lack of stakeholders' input. 4. School based SE expectations don't align with cultural beliefs. 5. Curriculum is highly influenced by informal curriculum. We thus, concluded that implementers and policy makers can use bottom-up approaches to include all stakeholders' needs. The study recommends that a comprehensive curriculum should be adapted to help better address students' needs. Schools can incorporate peer education.

**Key words:** Uganda, Sexuality, Adolescents, Sexuality Education, Curriculum, Secondary Schools

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**Introduction**

Sexuality education is an education that encourages youths to be abstinent until they are physically, mentally, and emotionally ready for mature sexual relationships (WHO, 2018). Under sexuality education adolescents are also educated about setting limits on how to deal with social, media, and partner pressure. Sexuality education is also considered an avenue that helps students acquire an understanding of, and respect for human love, sexual intercourse and reproduction. In the same light, SE has been shown to play an important role in the campaign against HIV because this education has been able to reach young people with HIV information and equipped them with skills, they need to protect themselves against the scourge (UNESCO, 2009). Henceforth, sexuality education is essential for adolescents because this education skills and empowers them to better understand their sexuality and relationships, experience improved sexual health, stay in school and overall enjoy a quality life (Hussain 2013, Muhwezi et al, 2015; Kemigisha et al, 2018). In this regard, Uganda set up sexuality education strategies for adolescents in school.

The first school curricula for sexuality education were introduced in 1980s, a period when HIV/AIDS was at its peak, therefore, were introduced as a strategy to fight the scourge (Bruce, 2018). However, SE is not new in Uganda it was already in existence, long before it was introduced in schools, this subject was the requisite of the home and was grounded on cultural and societal values. The society participated in planning and implementing lessons on sexuality to help their adolescents undergo cultural practices that prepared them for marriage. Today, the school edition has been added and its curriculum is grounded on various curricula of different national and international bodies.

For instance, in 2001, the Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy for Communication to Youth (PIASCY) an official program that was led by President Museveni was introduced. Under this curriculum, SE was about abstinence only and was taught under the ABC (Abstinence, Be Faithful, and Use Condoms) framework. The framework emphasises abstinence from sex until marriage, faithfulness when in marriage, and using a condom as a preventive measure from STDs and unwanted pregnancies as the last resort when both abstinence and fidelity have completely failed.

In 2009, UNESCO established international guidelines to guide the instruction of SE in schools worldwide (Herat et al, 2018). Uganda joined the rest of the world to promote clear, comprehensive, and evidence-informed sexuality education for its schools by use of the guidelines. According to these guidelines, comprehensive education, refers to the breadth and depth of topics and to content that is delivered under the guidance age group of learners. UNESCO emphasizes that SE should be consistently delivered to learners' overtime, throughout their education, rather than a one-off lesson or intervention. In addition, the most important

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emphasis in this guideline is put on the fact that children are not ready for sexual contact with other people.

In 2013, government officials from 20 Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) countries met, borrowed from UNESCO (2009) guidelines and came up with a new curriculum that they believed was more relevant and applicable to children and youth of Eastern and Southern Africa. The goal of the (ESA) curriculum is to increase adolescent knowledge regarding protective behaviour, including rejecting unwanted sex, delaying involvement in sexual intercourse, and practicing safe sex (Kemigisha et al, 2019, De Haas and Hutter, 2020). The Ministry of Education and Sports of Uganda, drew from this curriculum and set to implement sexuality education in schools

However, as indicated in the problem statement, adolescents in school continue to face sexual related challenges though Uganda has a national sexuality education framework in place, (Boozalis et al, 2020). Therefore, this study is meant to demonstrate how SE curriculum can be improved to be more effective in curbing sexual related challenges met by adolescents in secondary school.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While Uganda has impressive consideration of sexuality education on paper based on global and national frameworks, the implementation of the set strategies as indicated above, it remains a challenge to prevent physical and emotional sexual problems amongst adolescents in schools (Hussain: 2013, Boozalis et al, 2020). Studies still show high rates of sexual challenges amongst adolescents in Uganda and worldwide. For instance, adolescent pregnancy is one of the leading causes of school dropout among school girls mainly in the rural schools of Uganda (MOE& S, 2018, Kemigisha et al, 2018). Such findings undermine the goals of Universal Secondary Education and sustainable development Goal 4 which talks about access to quality education. According to the 2017 Ministry of Education and Sports report, pregnancy was responsible for 21% of school dropout among girls in Uganda. This was second to financial constraints which account for 43% of girls' drop out. High school-dropout rate among female secondary school students threatens Uganda's economic prospects, employment opportunities and overall well-being of the people of Uganda. More so, research observes that uneducated adolescent mothers are likely to pass on to their children a legacy of poor health, substandard education and subsistence living, creating a cycle of poverty that is hard to break (UN,2013;WHO, 2018).

Such findings indicate that the delivery and implementation of the set strategies still faces unknown bottlenecks which prevent it from fully addressing sexual problems amongst adolescents in schools. Hence, this study assesses the curriculum secondary schools use for Sexuality Education (SE) to understand why this education has not met its expectations. The findings from the study will inform policymakers and increase public health attention on the gaps and opportunities for prevention of adolescents from poor reproductive health outcomes.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Sexuality education is considered a health and human development support for adolescents because it encourages them to be abstinent until they are physically, mentally, and emotionally ready for mature sexual relationships (WHO, 2018, Boozalis et al, 2020). Sexuality education is

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also described as a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and forming attitudes, beliefs and values about, sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. It helps young people develop skills so that they make informed choices about their behaviour, and feel confident and competent about acting on these choices (The Irish National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1996:05) Research also asserts that adolescents who have undergone this education are expected to be knowledgeable and skilled to differentiate between accurate and inaccurate information (De Haas and Hutter, 2020). Therefore, the above-mentioned strategies have been designed to teach students about sexuality using age-appropriate and culturally relevant approaches to provide scientifically accurate, realistic, non-judgemental information (Hussain: 2013).

However, though SE is considered appropriate and necessary for adolescents in school, and Uganda signed a declaration in the (2013) ESA meeting supporting comprehensive sexuality education in member nations, this education was met with resistance from Ugandan senators who recommended for the banning of SE in schools in 2016. They argued that sexuality education would erode Uganda's culture and morality (Ninsiima *et al*, 2019). In the same light, other stake holders including parents, religious leaders and teachers, held the view that the less adolescents know about sex the better (Kemigisha *et al*, 2019).

However in May 2018, the ban was lifted and the first lady/minister of education officially launched the national sexuality education framework. Hence, from that time topics of sexuality were incorporated into the written curriculum, into subjects of Biology, Religious Education and Literature subjects. The curriculum includes key teaching objectives, the development of learning objectives, the presentation of concepts, and the delivery of clear key messages in a structured way (De Haas and Hutter, 2020).

The guideline encompasses four major themes of: Human Development, Relationships, Sexual Behaviour and Sexual Health. These major themes have been further broken into topics which have been integrated into curriculum subjects such as Biology and Religious Education (Ninsiima *et al*, 2019). The topics contained in the curriculum are: Self-awareness, self and others' relationships and power in relationships; human development, puberty, the body, and reproduction; sexuality and sexual behaviour; sexual health- STIs/HIV/AIDS/STDs, and their prevention using condoms, treatment, care; sexual health- such as pregnancy, contraception, and abortion; and communication, negotiation, and decision-making skills.

The framework is no different to other comprehensive sexual education curricula because it endorses a "holistic" sexual education and permits young people to make decisions about their sexuality. However, instead of advocating for abstinence, its number one principle is "God-fearing" and it does not mention condom use or contraceptives (Boozalis *et al*, 2020). implementers of this curriculum argue that providing students with information on where to obtain and how to use contraception will encourage immoral and health-compromising sexual behaviours which will, in turn increase the rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancy (De Haas and Hutter, 2020).

On the other hand, UNESCO (2023) recommends comprehensive sexuality education saying that with this approach young people learn to treat each other with respect and dignity from an early age and gain skills for better decision making, communications, and critical analysis. It also teaches them that they can talk to an adult they trust when they are confused

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about their bodies, relationships and values. Teaches them to think about what is right and safe for them and how to avoid coercion, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and early and unintended pregnancy, and where to go for help. They learn to identify what violence against children and women looks like, including sexual violence, and to understand injustice based on gender. They learn to uphold universal values of equality, love and kindness.

Hence forth, this study seeks to understand and further clarify how the curriculum used in schools has influenced the performance of sexuality education. It is hoped that findings will set in motion debate of revising SE curriculum to better suit the expectations of consumers.

### **Methodology**

To assess the curriculum, we conducted a qualitative study in secondary schools within Mbarara Municipality. Due to the heterogeneous nature of schools in Mbarara we purposively selected (N=6) out of (N=34). The difference in school category also guided our sample selection to ensure inclusion of schools' diverse views and experiences about the SE curriculum. Therefore, we sampled from full boarding, half-boarding and day, single-gender, mixed-gender schools. Our selection of schools was also made in consideration to school foundation bodies, we selected from Christian, Moslem, Born-Again and secular schools as found in Mbarara Municipality. Our participants were also purposively selected as people who have closely encountered with the curriculum and these were 144 students, 12 teachers, 6 head teachers and 2 Municipal Education officers, making a total number of participants was (N=164).

Our student sample was selected from S1-S4 classes of students ranging from 10-17 years. Students who didn't belong to this classes or age group were excluded from the study. This sample was composed of N=72 males and N=72 females, whereby 24 were sampled from each school. We used systematic random or stratified sampling depending on the nature of the population. At the single gender schools where the population was homogenous, we used simple random sampling to obtain 6 students from each class. While the 6 participants were obtained by stratified sampling at the mixed schools.

The teacher population being heterogeneous, we used purposive and stratified random sampling to obtain 2 teachers from each school. These were either in charge of guidance and counselling, patrons of the SE clubs and societies, or were teaching a subject in which a component of SE has been incorporated. Any teachers who were not involved in any of the above-mentioned activities were excluded from the study. For our study, we selected six subject teachers of Biology, Christian religious education, and Literature whereby 2 were selected per subject. The other 6 were selected from school counsellors and club patrons, 3 were selected from each section respectively.

All 6 head teachers of the participating schools were purposively sampled to participate in the study because they plan, monitor and evaluate all SE programs run in their schools. Municipal education officers who monitor and evaluate the implementation of SE programs in secondary schools were also purposively sampled.

To collect data, we deeply engaged with our participants through FGDs as our primary tools which were supplemented with one-one, in-depth interviews. For easier management of FGDs, we grouped student participants into two clusters of early-stage adolescents (ESAs) 10-14 and middle stage adolescents (MSAs) 15-17 and in a space of time that varied from one to one

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and a half hours, we held one FGD with each group separately. At each school, separate one–one in-depth- interview, was also carried out with each teacher and head teacher, in varied durations between 40 minutes and one hour. Out of school, we held a one-hour, in-depth interview with each Municipal Education officer. After collection of data a thematic analysis was made and we came up with transcripts of raw data which we carefully studied and coded according to themes, under which we presented and interpreted findings.

In addition, to the FGDs and interviews, we also reviewed the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports sexuality education 2018 framework and other relevant literature like the UNESCO 2009 International Sexuality Education guidelines, the Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) 2013 curriculum.

Before commencement Ethical approval to conduct the study was granted by Mbarara University Research Ethics Committee in Mbarara-Uganda (**Reference no.13/06-19**). Informed consent was given by all participants before being interviewed for the study.

## **Results**

Data shows that an overwhelming majority participants view sexuality Education (SE) as an important subject for adolescents in schools because it is educative, beneficial, relevant, and a subject. (Teacher 1-1) said:

Through SE students have learnt to make informed choices regarding their sexual and reproductive health to avoid practices that could cause them drop out of school (Teacher 1-1).

This study considers sexuality education an important and essential subject because it guides adolescents to make informed choices about their sexuality by offering them information which helps them to understand the reproductive system and their bodily changes. Hence with knowledge, students are considered skilled enough to make informed choices regarding their sexual and reproductive health. Topics in Religious Education and literature which teach about relationships are also considered important for adolescents. In these lessons, students are educated to make right decisions about relationships and avoid those that might cause them to drop out of school or get unwanted pregnancies or be infected with STIs including HIV/AIDS.

In addition, findings demonstrate that SE has not only been educative but has also been used to perpetuate good discipline among students in schools. It was revealed that when a student is caught engaging in any harmful sexual behaviour, he/she is considered undisciplined, and such an action leads to various forms of punishments such as suspension or expulsion from school. Therefore, head teachers from all schools expressed pleasure about the teaching of sexuality education which they said had reduced on the number of students engaging in sexuality related forms of indiscipline or challenges. Head teachers interviewed for this study came out with a common view that from sexuality education lessons, students have been educated to live sexually disciplined lives, so they behave more responsibly. Head Teacher 1 had this to say,

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SE learning has minimized the number of students who get sexual related challenges while still in school. Similarly, a teacher said, SE helps schools reduce on school dropouts and maintains disciplined students (Head Teacher 1).

Therefore, this study regards SE as a significant subject in the lives of adolescents who in search for identity need guidance because they frequently find themselves confused between the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’.

However, though SE is viewed as important and necessary in the lives of adolescents, findings show that schools still fear to teach SE comprehensively. Findings presented discomfort amongst teachers whereby majority confessed that they are not comfortable talking about sexual related issues (which they referred to as *embarrassing*) with their students. It was common in all schools that most teachers had not taught about contraception topics and those who did found it difficult answering students’ questions. Teacher 3-2 said:

Teaching about embarrassing topics like condom use is not easy especially when we hold open discussions with our classes...students come up with intriguing questions. I think these topics should be handled by medical personnel (Teacher 3-2).

Although, teachers confessed that they find teaching SE complex, majority viewed comprehensive SE as necessary in schools because adolescents are not abstaining as assumed. Below are some quotations from interviews with Teacher 3-1, 5-2, and 6-1 who said,

As a teacher in charge of guidance and counselling, records indicate that a significant number of students get sexual related challenges (Teacher 3-1). I think it’s time they are taught about contraceptives and family planning.... our students are still getting challenges like unplanned pregnancies and STIs (Teacher 5-2). Schools should provide more information...instilling fear is not working (Teacher 6-1).

Data from students FGDs also clearly presented displeasure about the “God-fearing” teaching approach that schools are using for SE. Majority of students held the opinion that it’s not right for schools to keep important information from them. It was a common view that during their lessons, teachers were emphasizing behavioural change topics while ignoring topics to do with preventative methods. They argued that schools are failing to educate SE comprehensively thinking that their students *are innocent and the less they know the better*, but it’s not the case because some students are sexually active therefore require comprehensive SE.

During an FGD, student 1-2-9 was greatly supported when he said,

If girls in school are still getting pregnant, it means we must be taught about how to prevent early and unwanted pregnancy to avoid dropping out of school... we need to be educated about contraceptives and where one can obtain them from in case one cannot resist the sexual pressure. (Student, 1-2-9)

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Still in an FGD in school 3 student 3-2-10 said,

It is not good to keep us ignorant of contraception which is essential in preventing us from getting un-planned pregnancies. We should be taught about contraceptives as well as prevention methods against Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). This is because whether teachers like it or not, some students engage in sex, and so need to know this information (Student 3-2-10).

Another finding of this study is that teaching SE in the traditional classroom has not fully brought out the purpose of SE because students majorly focus on passing examinations. Henceforth, their focus on other potential benefits of SE related to their wellbeing has been lost. According to students, SE topics which are incorporated into Biology and Religious Education are just like any other topic on the school curriculum which they must study to pass examinations.

Student 6-2-11 said,

Students tend to learn for passing exams when we study sexuality topics in class. The topics for behaviour change are taught during guidance and counselling sessions (Student 6-2-11).

In this regard teacher 6-2 also said,

SE is likely to lose its primary purpose because it has been incorporated into other subjects...students might simply study these topics for examination purposes and forget about SE's major rationale which is behavioural change. (Teacher 6-2)

According to adult participants, the other factor challenging the SE curriculum is resistance from stakeholders such as parents and other community leaders. According to data, this resistance prevails because these stakeholders either do not have any information or have scanty information about the SE curriculum. This study observes that while medical personnel are invited into schools to talk to students about sexuality issues and concerns, parents and other community leaders/members are never given that opportunity. Their input is only sought for academic, sports, and discipline issues. Henceforth, lack of their input has left parents and community members curious and uncomfortable as they wonder what schools are teaching their children. Data clearly indicated that there are also some parents who think that sexuality education is an education that encourages and trains children to engage in sexual activities.

Teacher 3-1 showed concern when he said that,

Parents must be informed about what we are teaching their children...it was challenging when a parent called me and asked why the school had started teaching children about sex" (Teacher 3-1)



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In the same tune, Education Officer 2 interviewed for this study also confirmed this perception from parents about sexuality education. He said that,

Parents think that school-based SE is very different because while home SE prepares adolescents for marriage, school SE teaches young people to avoid dropping out of school...to parents school SE means anything students can use like contraceptives or even abortion as long as the method helps them to keep in school. Parents do not agree to such education (Education Officer 2)

To an extent, school-based SE was found to contradict home based. For instance, it was reported by District Education Officer 1 that,

In some cultures, parents start encouraging their children to start looking out for marriage partners as early as 18 yet at this age majority of adolescents are still in school. So, at home, adolescents receive messages which contradict the abstinence message in the school-based SE...It would be good if parents are involved in planning SE for their children... when parents are involved, they get coordinated with school and are well informed about SE plans, curriculum and their implementation...thus making it easier for them to handle SE concerns of their children back at home (District Education Officer 1).

Another aspect established by this study is that the SE curriculum is influenced by external factors like the discussions, media and literature that are all peer led. Findings presented peer discussions as the largest source of information about sexuality for adolescents in both day and boarding schools. In day schools, it was discovered that peer discussions are majorly held on the way to and from schools while in boarding schools the discussions are held at night in the dormitories when lights are out. This was clarified by head teachers of the boarding schools who showed concern about their students' failure to sleep at night saying, most of their students keep awake and their discussions are usually about sexuality. The discussions they believed were not right because SE is a delicate area that requires close supervision and guidance from an older and informed person. These are some quotations from different head teacher and teacher interviews.

Our boys and girls know more than we imagine...their discussions in dormitories after lights are switched off are shocking and disturbing (Head teacher 2).

One day when we were going out for bed checking, I was shocked to hear a female student demonstrating how to seduce a man (Teacher 3-1).

On regular occasions teachers have reported that they find students awake and talking...most of the times about relationships and sexuality issues (Head teacher 3).

If peer learning is not well guided on what topics/areas students should discuss it can be very distractive...the media has a wide range of controversial sexuality information based on hearsay... and stereotypes (Teacher 4-2).

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Our young people must be guided by adults or else they will go astray (Teacher 6-1).

Though teachers and head teachers showed worry and fear that students were having these discussions, students did not see it the same light. Students on the contrary expressed satisfaction and confidence in these discussions saying they were freer with fellow students hence benefited more than learning from adults because they were able to ask their peers about sexuality aspects that they could never dare ask their parents or teachers. Below are some quotations from different student FGDs

Eeh! My teachers can never discuss with me what I discuss with my friends (student 1-1-12).

I find it embarrassing to ask my parents any sexuality related questions (Students 2-2-5).

We can be shy with teachers and our parents but not with our friends (Student 5-1-2).

When we discuss amongst ourselves, we ask anything and it's easy to understand any topic student (6-2-2).

In addition to peer discussions, teachers and head teachers also expressed concern over the continued exposure to pornographic literature by students, in spite of the existing school measures to mitigate the practice. Findings showed that pornographic literature is sneaked into both boarding and day schools by students and their accomplices. This literature is then secretly distributed to fellow students however, this practice was more common among female students than male students. This literature is often in form of Newspapers and magazines containing pornographic material. As a result, schools had intensified abrupt check-ups in both classrooms and dormitories to curb the practice and had also intensified their counselling about the dangers of reading such literature. Below are quotations from different teacher interviews,

We do regular check-up for any literature on sexual matters because students often sneak them into school (Teacher3-1).

When we find any pornographic literature in possession of students, we confiscate them because such information is likely to poison students' minds and distract them from their studies (Teacher 5-2).

On few occasions, we have found some students with literature that is not suitable for their age. We have confiscated such literature and counselled our students about the dangers of reading such literature (Teacher 9)

To explain this further, student 3-3-11 said,

I am worried that many students are getting the wrong information from friends....When a student gets access to pornographic literature, this literature

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rotates around many students in the school and sometimes they even send it to their friends in other schools. (Student 3-2-11)

The study further established that another source of pornography are pornographic videos watched or obtained from the local video halls (ebibanda). Teacher 6-2 was concerned that day students on their way home after school stop at the local video halls to watch pornographic videos. He said,

People from my community have reported to me with concern about some students who instead of going home after school spend a lot of time in the “bibanda” watching pornographic videos (Teacher 6-2).

Data also indicates that not only do day students watch these videos on their way home but at times escape from school to go watch these videos at the nearby local halls. However, this habit was more prominent among male day scholars. Students in their FDGs had this to say,

At times these “bad” videos are watched during the day whereby some students escape from school at break or lunch time to go and watch them (Student 1-2-6).

There is a group of boys who usually don’t attend afternoon lessons because they escape from school at lunch and go to the video halls (student 4-1-8).

In the boarding schools, data showed that pornographic videos are watched on cell-phones that are sneaked into the school illegally. These videos are watched at night in dormitories after lights are switched off. When asked about this, below are some quotations from different student FDGs we held in boarding schools.

There is a group of boys who usually don’t sleep when lights are out...I have been told that they stay up to watch sex videos. (Student 1-2-8)

I have heard that during the weekend, some students hide in entertainment prefect’s room and watch “bad videos” (Student 2-2-10)

Watching pornography on the telephones has become a common practice in the school and this is likely to cause sexual arousal which could encourage sex out of marriage leading to unwanted pregnancies, school drop-out and STIs including HIV (Student 4-2-9).

Watching pornographic material was also reported in the homes, where students secretly watch these videos in the absence of their parents. In relation to such findings, teacher 5-1 said,

One parent found his son watching a pornographic video after mid night when the rest of the people in the home had gone to bed...the parent was bitter and brought his son to school to be disciplined the following day because the son told him that he had obtained the cell phone from a friend at school ...when the friend was summoned to office to explain where he had obtained the telephone from, he said

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that he had obtained it from another friend...it seemed to be a cycle of friends sharing the video” (Teacher 5-1)

However, although a significant number of students watch pornography, this practice is detested by students. In the FGDs, significant numbers expressed negative opinions about this practice and suggested some solutions to stamp out the vice, particularly in boarding sections of schools. For example, these students requested that more check-ups be done by the school administration to take away the phones that students sneak into school illegally.

The school “talking” compounds are also an avenue that schools use to enhance the SE curriculum. These are scenarios where schools display numerous posters, fliers, and sign posts intended to pass on messages which discourage students from engaging in early sex, or marriages by bringing out the dangers of such behaviour. These include catching of STDs, AIDS, and unwanted pregnancies among others. Therefore, by default, talking compounds are meant to encourage good behaviour. Indeed, during a visit to study schools, posters and fliers encouraging good and acceptable sexual behaviour were a noticeable feature of school compounds.

## **Discussion**

Participants from all categories unanimously agreed that sexuality education is an important subject for school going adolescents therefore schools should continue to teach this subject. However, though SE is considered appropriate and necessary in the life of adolescents in school data showed that its curriculum is constrained.

In the first instance it was established that SE is taught from a God-fearing perspective, an approach that teaches adolescents to abstain and not indulge in any sexual activities before marriage lest they displease God and are punished. In this regard, schools have resorted to teaching a curriculum that instills fear, shame, and guilt in relation to sexual activity. Students are made to view sexuality as an area they should not discuss about because it is only for adults. The “talking” compounds are one of the avenues, schools use to advance these perspectives. According to participants the messages are meant to constantly remind students to behave responsibly and avoid the deadly consequences of irresponsible sexual behavior.

Further still, it was established that the comprehensive curriculum is not used because some schools believe that when students know less about sexuality, they are more likely to be better disciplined than those who have been exposed to vast information (Boozalis et al 2020). It’s probably this view that has given teachers a lee way to avoid teaching SE comprehensively as entailed in the curriculum. However, findings from both literature and data established that students are not as ignorant about sexuality as their teachers assume. In addition to school set curriculum students obtain vast information about sexuality from peers, literature and the media.

Findings also indicated that though comprehensive teaching is avoided in schools, participants showed displeasure about the “God fearing” approach and commended that schools start teaching SE comprehensively. Participants from all categories unanimously agreed that comprehensive SE is more beneficial to students because it allows them access to appropriate sexual and reproductive health related information and services. Hence, reducing on high rates of students who get infected with STIs, pregnancies and eventually school dropout. Participants

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further argued that sexuality is human and something one should not feel guilty or be ashamed about therefore teachers/schools should come out openly and teach the students age-appropriate comprehensive SE. More-so from data it was evident that students are still being infected with STIs and girls dropping out of school due to pregnancies. Literature also demonstrated that diverse populations of parents are supportive of school-based SE (Hussain et al, 2018). Such findings show its time schools held the bull by the horns and embraced comprehensive teaching of SE Henceforth, this study trusts that SE would yield better results if schools teach it comprehensively.

Findings also highlighted the fact that students, understand better when information is obtained from peers yet findings show that schools have not given attention to this aspect. When asked why they wanted to learn from fellow students, they argued that peers are more understanding, trustworthy and dependable than their teachers. This implies education obtained from self-assigned informal peer educators found in schools does impact the SE curriculum. Schools must therefore set well guided peer-peer strategies that will teach their students to use their critical faculties and critique when receiving information from their peers. This will then guard them from slavishly conforming to popular but health-compromising peer practices.

This study also observes that parents, culture and society play a primary role in shaping key aspects of their children's sexual identity, and sexual and social relationships (Boozalis, et al 2020). In the same accord, Ajzen's 1985 theory of planned behavior clearly shows that the community and religious bodies to which children belong play a big role in influencing their sexual behavior. Therefore, a curriculum can only be meaningful if it aligns with the behavioral and normative beliefs as well as the social norms of the societies that it is being used within.

In the case of Uganda, where the formation of SE curriculum is on a top-down basis and policy makers have been guided by the UNESCO (2009) international guidelines and ESA to design an SE curriculum for schools, input from culture and society to which these adolescents belong is very limited. Therefore, as data implicated parents' have limited knowledge about the curriculum. They don't know what their children are taught yet sexuality is a very sensitive area. Probably this explains why stakeholders (parents, religious, cultural, political leaders) are resisting SE in schools, some parents have said sexuality education is an irrelevant and unnecessary education for their children (Kemigisha *et al*, 2018). Therefore, to encourage acceptability and make SE more society friendly, policy makers could adapt bottom-up approaches so that the curriculum is developed from the grass roots, allowing consumers to participate in its initial stages of planning. Involving parents, this study believes would put them in good position that would assist them to understand the curriculum better. More so appreciate it and understand how to use it back at home while they advise their children about sexual related matters.

This study also established that messages sent out in school-based SE sometimes contradict those of home-based SE. For example while home based sexuality takes adolescents through sexuality cultural practices to prepare them for marriage, on the other hand school-based SE aims at helping students avoid contracting STIS, getting unwanted pregnancies that might cause them to drop out of school. Society therefore, views this education as a kind of leeway schools are erecting for young people to engage in sexuality before marriage. These contradictory messages have left some students confused.

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Therefore, for society and schools to come to a mutual understanding about SE, close co-operation with parents and other community stake holders should be established. For instance, in addition to medical personnel, schools should invite parents and other community leaders like religious and cultural leaders to be part of school SE programs

Another concern raised in this study is that the SE curriculum does not give the relationship topic the attention it deserves. SE was introduced in Uganda's schools after HIV, therefore according to findings, the curriculum mainly teaches about sexuality matters leaving out the relationships issue yet the two go hand in hand. Sexuality cannot be studied in isolation without relationships because its within relationships that sexuality is born (McNamara et al: 2010). Data clearly indicated that this topic is a crucial topic that shouldn't be left out in an SE curriculum because most of the sexuality problems faced by students rise out of wrong relationships. This study thus, established that lack of inclusion and intensive teaching about relationships undermines the effectiveness of the SE curriculum

In conclusion, data shows that factors challenging the curriculum are both internal and external. Whereby the internal ones are found within the school formal curriculum procedures while the external ones are informal but also have a significant impact on the curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

In this study we established that the SE curriculum has not been effective enough because schools do not teach sexuality comprehensively, hence has failed to meet students' needs. We thus concluded that sexuality education can be more effective when it is taught comprehensively, because in that way it will better address students' needs.

We also learnt that schools are using SE as a tool to instil fear and shame which has made students repulsive to the subject hence concluded that teaching students about sexuality as a normal and human development aspect is likely to create students' better acceptance of the subject.

If schools give more emphasis to relationships topic students will better understand how to make healthy relationships, after all sexuality begins with relationships.

More so, this study observes that the top bottom approach used in developing and implementing the curriculum does not fully allow stakeholders to express their needs, therefore we concluded that if planners and curriculum designers draw the curriculum from a bottom-up perspective, which gives all stake holders opportunity to participate right from the development to its implementation, then their sexuality education needs would be better attended to and hence make sexuality education more effective.

Informal peer education has a significant influence on formal SE curriculum; however schools have overlooked and under rated its impact. We conclude that if schools incorporate guided peer education sessions they would yield better SE results.

### **Recommendations**

In order to make sexuality education more effective, the study recommends that The Ministry of Education and Sports should encourage and support schools to start teaching SE comprehensively.

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In addition, policy makers should use a more inclusive approach so that all stakeholders are coordinated and involved in the development and implementation of the SE curriculum. On this background, the study developed recommends the use of a new approach known as “*The 3S Theory*”. This theory follows the bottom-up principles to allow all stakeholders participation.

We also recommend that schools introduce and incorporate guided peer education sessions on the curriculum.

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