



# Teachers' perceptions on teaching comprehensive sexuality education in early grades in Chipinge, Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

This study aimed at unravelling and comprehending teachers' perceptions on the teaching of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in early grades. The study opted for a qualitative case study design in an interpretive paradigm, with semi-structured interviews and document analysis as data-gathering instruments. Ten primary school teachers responsible for early childhood development were selected through purposive sampling. The collected data were analysed using a thematic approach. This study revealed that early grade teachers in Zimbabwe perceived CSE as essential in empowering early grade children with skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to protect them from sexual abuse. However, they were uncomfortable teaching it due to several cultural restrictions. The teachers felt the need to be supported in the teaching of CSE in early childhood by being provided with a curriculum, appropriate professional development strategies, and teaching materials. The study recommends the teaching of CSE at early childhood development level. Parents should be educated on the significance and objectives of CSE for their children.

**Keywords:** child sexual abuse, comprehensive sexuality education, adolescence, policy, early childhood development (ECD)

## Introduction

Child sexual abuse is rampant in Zimbabwe (Nyamanhindi, 2015; Vinga, 2014). Its consequences are inimical to child development, hence comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) should be taught to bring it under control (Kenny & Wurtule, 2012; Mantula &

Saloojee, 2016). Several attempts in Zimbabwe have been made to contain it, attempts such as crafting laws that match international standards in criminalising child sexual abuse and the imposition of heavy punishment to transgressors, but they have failed (Mantula & Saloojee, 2016). Lack of effective implementation due to a paucity of funding weakens these strategies (Kenny & Wurtule, 2012; Mantula & Saloojee, 2016). However, research has shown that CSE effectively controls child sexual abuse; hence there is a need to provide CSE in early grades in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe is one of the countries in dire need of CSE because it is one of the nations hardest hit by child sexual abuse, which is exacerbated by the lack of CSE provision in the curriculum. Zimbabwe ranks in the fifth position in the world concerning the prevalence of child sexual abuse (Laccino, 2014; Mantula & Saloojee, 2016). This position points to a need to provide CSE to children in early grades in Zimbabwe. CSE could provide them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to resist sexual abuse (Mantula & Saloojee, 2016; Ogolla & Ondia, 2019). And the rate of this child sexual abuse is ever escalating (Feltoe, 2018), hence the need for CSE for Zimbabwean children should not be underestimated. Sexual abuse is not limited to adolescents but also rampant in children in early grades in Zimbabwe (Mantula & Saloojee, 2016). Children from five to eight years old should be taught CSE, following the guidelines laid out for teaching this (UNICEF, 2014).

CSE refers to education purported to help learners to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that can enable them to enjoy their sexuality in all domains (International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2010). According to UNESCO (2018), CSE is curriculum based and delivers age-oriented content using culturally acceptable approaches.

For this paper, *early grades* refers to the first sector of primary education in Zimbabwe (Thabela, 2018; Tsiko, 2018). Early grade learners are aged from three to eight years. Their educational levels are ECD-A, ECD-B, Grade 1, and Grade 2 (Thabela, 2018). Early grade teachers need to be involved in CSE in order to teach it successfully. However, several prohibitive factors exist. Zimbabwean culture prohibits CSE teaching to children who have not attained adolescence (Maviya, 2019). However, CSE advocates the teaching of age-appropriate content to children and there is a lot pertaining to CSE that can be taught to children before the attainment of adolescence. Like most African nations, Zimbabwe believes that teaching CSE to young children drives them to experiment with sex (Maviya, 2019) yet in the Netherlands, it is offered successfully, starting from children aged four years (Rough, 2018). Some religions believe that CSE defiles children. In addition, it is construed as taboo to talk about, especially to children who have not yet attained adolescence (Gudyanga et al., 2019; Mugweni et al., 2013), hence inappropriate for young children. Consequently, attempts to teach the CSE content are resisted by most Zimbabweans.

This study aimed to unearth and comprehend the perceptions of teachers in Chipinge, Zimbabwe on the teaching of CSE to children in early grades. This could help determine appropriate strategies to provide CSE in early grades in order to help curtail child sexual abuse. The teaching of CSE in primary schools in Zimbabwe is essential because of Zimbabwe's particularly high prevalence of child sexual abuse (Laccino, 2014; Mantula &

Saloojee, 2016). Children in early grades are also vulnerable to this form of child abuse, which must be stopped because it hinders proper child development.

The main research question that guided the study was: “How do teachers perceive the teaching of comprehensive sexuality education in early grades in Chipinge?” The sub-research questions of the study are as follows:

- What value is given by teachers to the teaching of comprehensive sexuality education in early grades?
- What do teachers perceive as inhibitive factors to the teaching of comprehensive sexuality education in early grades?
- What strategies do teachers believe could help to promote the teaching of comprehensive sexuality education in early grades?

## Theoretical framework

The study was guided by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory of human development. According to this theory, human development occurs in five nested systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979). The theory was chosen as the theoretical framework because all its systems apply directly to this study.

The microsystem refers to the immediate environment of human beings, like their home and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Factors within this environment like religion, norms, values, and beliefs can influence teachers’ perceptions of CSE teaching in early grades. These environmental factors may well favour the provision of CSE, in which case the teachers may well have a positive attitude on the issue because these proximal factors are the most influential. However, if the environment is negative, these teachers may also have a negative attitude towards the provision of CSE.

The mesosystem refers to the relationships among two or more microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This could be the relationship among homes, communities, and religion. If these systems support CSE teaching in early grades, the teachers may not encounter difficulties in teaching the subject. A conflict among the systems on the issue could be inimical to the provision of CSE in early grades.

The exosystem is about the systems in which an individual is not directly involved, yet what happens in them impacts the individual. Teachers may not be part of the curriculum development unit that determines whether CSE should be taught in infant early grades. Yet these teachers would be affected because they are the ones who implement the curriculum. If they are excluded from the decision-making process, they may choose not to teach it.

The macrosystem is the furthest from the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An example of these systems is the parliament. These systems influence what happens in all the other systems. For example, if the members of a parliament pass a law that mandates the teaching

of CSE in early grades, teachers can teach the subject with impunity. And, if a law that prohibits the teaching of CSE were passed, teachers would be hesitant to teach it.

The chronosystem refers to change over time. For example, a teacher living during the AIDS pandemic period might want children to be taught CSE in order for them to be protected, but those who lived before the advent of the pandemic might not see a valid reason for doing so.

## Methodology

A qualitative case study design located in the interpretivist paradigm was chosen for this study because it allowed the researcher to study the phenomenon in its context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2011). It allowed the researcher to study the perceptions of teachers in the context of Chipinge district in Zimbabwe on the teaching of CSE in early grades. This made it easy for the researcher to unearth and comprehend the teachers' perceptions, and then determine appropriate strategies for promoting the teaching of CSE in early grades, as envisaged by Yin (2011). The interpretivist paradigm enabled the researcher to consider the uniqueness of the participants and to be cognisant of reality as presented by different participants, which further strengthened trustworthiness. A case study allowed the selection of a small manageable number of participants, which guaranteed rigour in the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

The semi-structured interviews used in this study enabled the researcher to probe (Johnson & Christensen, 2014) and also allowed the participants to request further clarifications on any the questions that they failed to comprehend, which helped to eliminate wild responses from participants (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Several documents were analysed in order to acquire rich information for answering the research questions (Bowen et al., 2017). Schemes of work, plans of work, anecdotal records, and children's exercise books were analysed. The schemes of work and plan books were analysed to ascertain whether teachers schemed and planned work on CSE. The depth and breadth of coverage had to be established too. This analysis played a complementary role in reflecting the perceptions of teachers on teaching of CSE in early grades. Children's exercise books were examined to see whether written work on CSE was given and, if given, the nature of CSE topics covered. Anecdotes recorded by teachers were analysed to see whether there was anything pertaining to CSE that could help to reflect the teachers' perceptions on the teaching of CSE. Document analysis was opted for because it is not affected by the researcher effect (Bowen et al., 2017). This triangulation of instruments in data generation promoted comparison of teachers' perceptions from different perspectives, which helped to ensure trustworthiness as envisioned by Jackson (2010).

Purposive sampling was employed to select information-rich participants who then provided appropriate and adequate data, which enhanced trustworthiness (Bowen et al., 2017). Ten teachers whose teaching experiences in the early grades ranged from 5 to 30 years were selected. These participants were considered information-rich participants due to their vast

experience in teaching children in early grades in Chipinge district in Zimbabwe where child sexual abuse is rampant, partly due to the lack of CSE provision for them.

In this study, the participating teachers are coded TA to TJ, with the first teacher being TA followed by TB, up to TJ. These are the teachers whose documents were also analysed. The participants were requested beforehand by the researcher to be interviewed and to have their documents analysed. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to them. They were shown the researcher's ethical clearance letter from the University of Pretoria and were asked to read, understand, and sign consent letters.

## Findings and discussion

Data analysis led to the emergence of the themes given below:

- Teachers' perceptions about the merits of offering CSE in early grades
- Prohibitive factors to the teaching of CSE in early grades
- Approaches that could be applied to promote the teaching of CSE to early grade children

The findings are now discussed under these themes.

### Teachers' perceived merits of teaching CSE in early grades

The data collected revealed succinctly what the teachers perceived as meritorious in offering CSE to early grade children. In response to the question on why CSE should be taught in infant classes, TA stated:

Children need to be taught how to avoid sexual abuses. They should be taught about all forms of sexual abuses so that they are in a good position to tell whether one would have abused them or not.

TC demonstrated feelings in line with what was said by TA by saying:

The teaching of CSE is pertinent because it brings light to our children so that they may not be abused since the rate at which they are abused is alarming. . . . It makes children aware of abusers and also enables them to resist sexual abuse.

TE said the following about CSE:

CSE has to be taught to young learners because it actually empowers them to be able to say no to various forms of abuses. It will protect them from contracting AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

The information above indicates what the teachers perceived as the merits of teaching CSE to early grade children, namely, helping to control child sexual abuse which culminates in minimising the contraction of sexually transmitted infections among early grade children.

This implies that teachers in Chipinge did not support the common misperception among people that CSE propels children to experiment with sex (UNESCO, 2015, 2018). The teachers' perception that CSE was instrumental in controlling child sexual abuse is appropriate given that the control of child sexual abuse is one of its integral functions (UNESCO, 2015). UNESCO's (2018) technical guidelines on CSE have confirmed this viewpoint. The explicit belief of CSE being a helpful tool in empowering children to avoid being sexually abused was also articulated by Bonjour and Vlugt (2018).

TA said:

CSE . . . protects children at the present moment and prepares them for their future roles in life.

The information provided above further gives information on what the teachers perceived as meritorious in teaching CSE, which is preparing children for their future sexual roles. This perceived merit of teaching CSE is in tandem with UNESCO's (2018) assertion that CSE assists learners to construct useful knowledge that they need throughout their lifetime. UNESCO (2018) has asserted that CSE helps to minimise children's vulnerability to sexual abuse and prepares them to take up their future roles. This assertion thus shows that some of the teachers in Chipinge had a sound perception of the virtues of teaching CSE in early grades.

And TB said:

Teaching CSE is a good idea because it enables children to report when abused which may help to prevent further abuses.

This teacher portrayed teachers as believing CSE has the functionality of enhancing the development of communication skills among young children, which could subsequently enable them to report when abused or when an attempt was made to abuse them. This perception is in tandem with Giannini (2019), who asserted that CSE enhances children's communication skills development. This clearly shows that these teachers have brilliant views pertaining to the significance of providing CSE if we take into consideration the development of communication skills among children in early grades. This envisioned function of CSE to early grade children is crucial because some victims of child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe do not report it because of a lack of communication skills (Maviya, 2019).

The other teachers' perceived merit of offering CSE to early grade children was its potential to provide information that prompted early grade learners to rectify their sexually risky behaviours. Consequently, teachers disclosed several sexually risky behaviours among children that could be addressed through the provision of CSE. These included engaging in sexual intercourse, forcing each other to engage in sexual intercourse, playing with their sexual organs, showing each other their sexual organs, using vulgar language, and imitating sexual activities.

TA had this to say on the use of vulgar language by children:

In most cases, you can hear children speaking in vulgar language. Children talk in vulgar language at school, and even songs they sing are jam-packed with sexuality.

In line with information pertaining to vulgar language, TC said the following:

Children use vulgar language. You can be shocked to hear learners talking in vulgar language at school and even songs they sing are replete with sexuality. They repeat songs sung during rain-making ceremonies and those sung by drunken people in their communities, which is a shame. Some songs are sung at funerals.

These interviewees' contributions indicate the teachers' concern over the use of vulgar language by children, which is socially unacceptable in any society. Anecdotal records of children also indicated the same, which implies that it is a living problem among children in Chipinge, Zimbabwe, hence teaching CSE to early grade children is meritorious because of its perceived capacity to address this problem articulated by the teachers. The use of vulgar language by children could be realistic because according to the behaviourists like Skinner, these children could possibly copy their language from drunken people since children can learn language through imitation (Mwamwenda, 2015). Thus, the teachers felt the necessity of teaching CSE in order to rectify such behaviour.

The other merit of teaching CSE perceived by the teachers was its potential to rectify the children's unacceptable behaviour of imitating sexual activities. This was reflected in the contributions they made as a way of attributing CSE with the potential to efficaciously deal with children's socially unacceptable behaviours. TA said the following about this imitation:

Do you know Mr Mahoso, that these little children imitate what they see elders doing? They imitate what they see their parents doing. . . . I mean imitating people having sexual intercourse, especially during social dramatic play.

TA's comments were in tandem with TB's:

I want to let you know that most learners, these young early grade children, imitate whatever they see their fathers and mothers doing at home, having sexual intercourse. Children portray several behaviours which show us openly that they need to be taught CSE.

On this issue, TJ just said:

Children imitate people and animals having sex.

What the participants said above was complemented by information obtained from several anecdotal records. The information given by teachers portrays the significance of CSE to young children as that of stopping their socially unacceptable behaviour of imitating sexual activities.

Teachers claimed that by imitating sexual activities, children were copying their parents who could be sharing bedrooms with their children and might engage in sexual intercourse when the children are still awake. These children may witness these activities frequently given that Bronfenbrenner identified the home as a microsystem that the children always occupy (Morrison, 2015). The sharing of bedrooms between parents and children could be prompted by poverty and parents could be unable to afford separate rooms for themselves and their children. The children may be imitating without full capacity to understand, hence CSE could be used to enlighten children in this predicament. If not enlightened, they may continue to imitate their parents since, according to the social learning theory, perfect behaviours for children are those practised by their parents, with boys imitating their fathers and girls emulating their mothers (Mwamwenda, 1985, 2015).

It was also lamentable to learn that children in early grades engaged in sexual intercourse. Teachers thus wanted CSE to be taught to children to correct this age-inappropriate behaviour. Below is information pertaining to children having sexual intercourse that was obtained from TE:

Children force each other to have sex when playing away from parents or adults.

TJ also provided information that was in tandem with TE's information by expounding:

One day a child came to me and said this one is doshing another, meaning having sexual intercourse, because they don't want to use the real word. The word dosh is their own word to describe sexual intercourse. CSE can stop this behaviour if taught to children.

TD added:

Some children are reported by others to the teacher for trying to have sexual intercourse with other children. Some even force other children to have sex.

These teachers who expressed the need for CSE to be taught in early grades may have been driven by the fact that children were having sexual intercourse whilst still very young. They could pass HIV on to each other because some of these children could have already been abused sexually by HIV-positive adults. Some people believe that sexual intercourse with young children can enhance animal fertility, make them rich, promote bumper harvests, and cure AIDS. Some children could have been born HIV-positive. The most upsetting practice was that some of these very young children were coercing each other to have sex, which bears a resemblance to rape in adults, hence teachers perceived that CSE could help to curb such behaviours—which shows how crucial it is to teach CSE to children in early grades. The imitation of such sexual behaviours by children was acknowledged by Kellogg (2010) and Fletcher et al. (2013) who also acknowledged that the behaviour was extremely risky. Consequently, they saw CSE as important because they believed it could be taught to children to safeguard them from abuse by adults as well as stopping them from abusing each



other given that contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, is also possible among children themselves.

Other socially unacceptable sexual behaviour noted by teachers, which they felt could be addressed effectively through the provision of CSE, was showing each other their sexual organs. TC said:

Children even play with their sexual organs and sometimes show others or their friends their sexual organs, especially erect penises. I believe if children are effectively taught CSE such behaviours could be terminated.

TE had this to say on the same issue:

The tendency to show each other sexual organs is also a clear indicator. Children can just say, look at my penis, my friend. You know, young children are very funny, they actually show their colleagues those sexual organs, both boys and girls.

TJ stated the following:

These children enjoy stimulating their sexual organs and showing them to each other. This is done by both boys and girls.

The information provided above clearly indicates the teachers' discomfort with the sexual behaviours of the children they teach; as a result, they wanted CSE to be taught to children because they anticipated that it might assist these children in discarding such behaviours—which further shows what teachers believed to be another merit of teaching CSE to young children. The showing of each other, and the stimulation of, their sexual organs by children at the phallic stage is considered normal childhood behaviour by Sigmund Freud (Mwamwenda, 2015). However, the teachers were not comfortable with it. They wanted CSE to be taught in order to control such behaviour because it is socially unacceptable and sexually risky. Chavula (2016) also noted this behaviour among children given that they are sexual beings and consequently advised that it should not be ignored but rather be given attention through the provision of CSE.

TD had this to say:

CSE must be taught to young children because it can help to stop risky behaviours among children. Myself, I saw some of the children I teach playing with used condoms which was pathetic and undesirable. This is done by most children because when I shared my experience with other teachers, they also told me that they also saw children playing with used condoms as balloons.

CSE should be taught in order to eradicate such behaviour among children. The information provided by TD indicates that teachers perceived CSE as having the potential to stop children from picking up and playing with used condoms. This reinforces CSE as significant in promoting good health among learners because, if children are taught CSE, they may be able

to distinguish a balloon from a condom, which could help them avoid this risky health behaviour.

The teachers also expressed the view that CSE could be effective in clearing children's misconceptions pertaining to sexuality. TC said:

Children ask questions that are in line with sexuality . . . like about names of sexual organs.

TE had this to say:

You know, in fact, as I interact with children at classroom level, you find out that those children tend to ask me a lot of questions that are in line with sexuality education, which is an indicator that they need that form of education. They need it, and we should not delay to teach for their risky misconceptions to be cleared.

The information here again shows another of the teachers' perceived merits of teaching CSE to children in early grades—the clearing up of sexual misconceptions noted among children. Mayeza and Vincent (2019) also acknowledged misconceptions related to sexuality among children aged five and below, and ascribed these to exposure to pornography through media. Collins et al. (2017) expressed awareness of such misperceptions among children eight years and younger that had emanated from media. They attributed the misconceptions to the inability of children of this age group to distinguish between what happened on the screen and reality—due to their immaturity. According to Mayeza and Vincent (2019), areas that reflect children's misunderstandings regarding sexuality pertain to the names of their genitals and their functionality, the anatomical differences between boys and girls, and reproduction. If we consider the CSE aspects that the teachers wanted to be taught in early grades, they are justified because such concepts can be adequately catered for in CSE.

### Prohibitive factors to the teaching of CSE in early grades

Although teachers in this study indicated in a loud and clear way that they perceived the teaching of CSE in early grades as being crucial, the study also revealed a number of factors that militate against its provision. Teaching pupils anything against the will of their parents was perceived by teachers as potentially harmful to them because some parents could react in a way that might jeopardise them; they were afraid of the parents; afraid to teach CSE to young learners because it could be against the will of these parents. Teachers expressed their fear to teach CSE to young learners as follows: TA said:

The community members think teaching children about CSE encourages children to engage in sexual activities at a very young age. They think being silent about it is the best thing to do in order for them to be safe.

TH echoed TA, saying:

Teaching about sexuality is regarded as violation of beliefs, norms and values of the people within the school and community at large. Because of this factor, no one becomes comfortable to say out names of sexual organs. At our school, children are taught never to listen to someone using vulgar words. They are told that if they listen, they will be listening to the devil, which means if you try to teach them, they will end up taking you as the devil.

This information reveals the fear of teachers as one of the factors militating against the teaching of CSE in early grades. They felt the parents of these children would recognise it as a way of encouraging their children to engage in sexual activities—a direct violation of their norms and values, a view echoed by (Maviya, 2019). This notion can be explained by Bronfenbrenner’s theory in which culture belongs to the macrosystem, which means it impacts on how people within that culture construe things. The teachers anticipated opposition from the guardians of these children. This resistance to the teaching of CSE to young children raised by these teachers could be valid given that Browne (2015) and Ketting and Ivanova (2018) have also described it as a key challenge to CSE teaching in most nations. Most people, like these parents, believe that teaching CSE to young children can propel them to engage in sexual intercourse too early—a belief also upheld by Nigerians, Zambians, and the Tswana (Kadonsi, 2019) even though there is strong empirical evidence to the contrary (Haberland & Rogow, 2015). Emmanuel (2015) and Francis (2010) also acknowledged parental resistance as a major factor that can inhibit teachers from teaching CSE to young children. Nevertheless, Muridzo and Malianga (2015) and Ketting and Ivanova (2018) still recommended teaching CSE to children, arguing that it is dealing with the problem before it gets out of hand and is perhaps the most effective strategy.

The religious beliefs of the people of Chipinge, Zimbabwe were also other perceived as prohibitive factors to the teaching of CSE in early grades in Zimbabwe. TB succinctly elucidated this factor by saying:

Most Christian churches within our community take the teaching of CSE as a taboo. These churches prohibit the teaching of CSE to early grade children. . . . They think it corrupts the children. They also think that talking about sexuality is unholy.

TI contributed as follows:

Christians believe that it makes people unrighteous before God.

TC had this to say:

At my school, most teachers are Christians. This religion does not allow children to be taught about sexuality. Some religious sects see it as too early to educate or talk about it to early grade learners. They take it as a taboo to teach children about sexuality, and then we avoid teaching it. You cannot do what is taboo. To be safe, you avoid it.

What TC said resonates with the following information from TC:

Christianity does not allow people to talk about sexuality. Christian parents do not want their children to be taught sexuality, saying it's immoral. It is regarded as taboo to talk about sexuality with children.

And TJ said:

The belief is that teaching them about sex can offend God since it spoils the innocence of the children that they are born with.

The statements from all these teachers portray religion as another factor that impedes the teaching of CSE—even though it is imperative to teach the subject to young learners. Teachers may avoid teaching CSE because as they anticipate opposition from parents and the community at large due to their religious beliefs. Browne (2015) also acknowledged religion as one of the sources of opposition to the teaching of CSE.

### Approaches that can be applied to promote the teaching of CSE to early grade children

The teachers in Zimbabwe also felt that they could not teach CSE efficaciously without back-up. They require backing in the form of a CSE curriculum to teach early grade learners. The following is what TB said about the CSE curriculum issue:

A curriculum is needed. Teachers must be provided with a syllabus for CSE.

In a similar vein, TE said:

Teachers must be given a curriculum. . . . It will give us a green light to teach that form of education. We will know the content to teach for it will guide us on that.

TF complemented the above information by stating:

Even if teachers want to teach CSE, there are some militating factors. There is no syllabus. This should be provided.

The contributions of these teachers succinctly indicated the need to provide teachers with a curriculum to teach CSE in early grades. The absence of such a curriculum was also noted during document analysis. Indeed, a curriculum to facilitate the teaching of CSE is necessary (Emmanuel, 2015). This could be a good strategy because it would signpost to teachers the content that should be taught to these children (UNESCO, 2015). This could also help to bring about uniformity in the content taught. If specialists on CSE were to develop a curriculum in this area, crucial aspects of CSE would be taught to children in early grades. A curriculum would guarantee quality in the delivery of CSE in early grades in Zimbabwe.

These teachers also wanted to be provided with a stand-alone curriculum because they felt that if CSE topics were factored into other subjects, their value could be eclipsed by them. This was substantiated by TC in the subsequent argument:

It is wise to teach CSE as a subject that stands alone because it will be dealt with thoroughly. Teachers may overlook if CSE content is factored in other subjects because if factored in other subjects, it may give an impression to them that it is not important. If it stands alone as a subject, it will have its own allocated time and will be valued.

The teachers also believed that if they were provided with staff development training on CSE curriculum implementation they would become sufficiently empowered to teach it. This viewpoint is portrayed by TA's contribution below:

Teachers need to be staff developed on how to implement this curriculum. In schools, what should be done is to staff-develop the teachers on CSE. . . . This can be done through in-service training.

TF argued thus:

Once the syllabus is available teachers must then be taught how to implement it.

In addition to the above, TJ advised:

It may also help if a curriculum for CSE is developed. The teachers should then be staff developed to implement it . . . by specialists of CSE.

The need for teachers' training in CSE curriculum implementation expressed by these teachers shows it to be another indispensable strategy needed by teachers to enable them to effectively deliver CSE to early grade children in Chipinge. UNESCO (2015) offered similar advice. And Emmanuel (2015) pointed out that in 1986, teachers in Portugal failed to teach CSE, which had been made mandatory, simply because of a lack of training in how to implement the curriculum. Ketting and Ivanova (2018) also recommended training in curriculum implementation, arguing that it equips the teachers with skills to motivate children to learn CSE, handle sensitive topics, develop critical thinking skills, and use the participatory methodology in teaching CSE to young children.

Enlightening parents on the significance of CSE to early grade children was also viewed by teachers as a strategy that could be employed to enable parents to allow teachers to teach CSE to their children. This was reflected by TJ who said:

Teachers and parents should be taught together to discard their wrong beliefs about teaching of sexuality to young learners. They should then be taught the benefits of teaching sexuality education to young children.

TC, in sharing the same line of thinking as TJ, said:

Parents should be helped to understand that CSE should be taught for the sake of their children's safety.

This strategy of convincing the parents of the importance of CSE to their children in early grades before teaching it to the children so as to avoid conflict with them was also brought forward by Maviya (2019).

The involvement of the government, through the crafting and implementation of legislation that legalised the teaching of CSE, was also viewed as a strategy that could facilitate the teaching of CSE to early grade children. The following information from two of the teachers indicates this:

If the mandate to teach CSE in early grades comes from the government that it should be taught and if it is then taught as one of the early grade subjects, people will accept it. (TI)

I think the government must also intervene. It can make the teaching of CSE to young children mandatory. If the government can come up with a circular requiring all schools in Zimbabwe to teach it, that could be helpful. Parents will not challenge the teachers if they teach their children CSE because they will be afraid to do so. (TG)

The enactment of such a law in Zimbabwe was also suggested by Maviya (2019) and again recommended in Zambia (Kadonsi, 2019). In the Netherlands, Germany, and Kenya it has produced dividends.

## Conclusions

Several conclusions about the teaching of CSE in early grades were drawn from this study. With regards to teachers' perceptions on the merits of teaching CSE to early grade children, it can be safely concluded that teachers in Chipinge district of Zimbabwe believed that CSE can help to stop children from engaging in sexually inappropriate behaviours like forcing each other to have sex during social dramatic play, publicly playing with their sexual organs, and showing each other their sexual organs. The other unwanted children's sexual behaviours perceived to be controllable through the provision of CSE among children in early grades were the use of vulgar language, and imitation of sexual intercourse activities. Development of skills to report sexual abuse, and development of skills to avoid being sexually abused, were other perceived merits of teaching CSE to these young learners. It can also be concluded that teachers in Chipinge considered the teaching of CSE to be efficacious in clearing up children's misconceptions on sexual matters, which otherwise could make children vulnerable to sexual abuse.

Besides the merits of teaching CSE, this study also unearthed factors that were instrumental in prohibiting the teaching of CSE in Chipinge. The culture did not allow anyone to teach or even talk about anything pertaining to sexuality with children because it is considered taboo. Any attempt to teach this subject could attract conflict with parents of the children. Opposition to the teaching of CSE to early grade children was also precipitated by religious beliefs because religious people in Chipinge believed that talking about sexuality with children can defile children's innate innocence.

Conclusions about the support needed by teachers in order to be able to deliver CSE are also made. Teachers need to be provided with a CSE curriculum. And when given, they should be taught how to implement it through workshops. The crafting and implementation of policies that legalise the teaching of CSE to early grade children should also be promulgated. Teachers would feel more comfortable about teaching CSE if they knew they were backed by the law.

## Recommendations

This study makes several recommendations, which follow. CSE in Zimbabwe must be taught in the early grades to protect children and to guide their sexual behaviours. A CSE curriculum for early grade teaching should be developed and teachers must be taught how to implement it. Early grade teachers should be provided with in-service training on teaching CSE to children. Early grade teachers' training institutions in Zimbabwe should also equip teacher trainees with skills to teach CSE so that they can change the situation in schools and communities. A policy that mandates teachers to teach CSE to early grade children must be made available. Parents must be made aware of this policy and of the importance of CSE so that they allow teachers to teach it to their children.

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