



Toward Comprehensive Sexuality: A Sex Education Curriculum for High School Students in China



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Introduction

Sex Education and Its Importance

What is sex education? It encompasses the **pedagogical** process of imparting knowledge and understanding about **sexuality**, and depending on the **region**, may include other relevant **topics**.

Why is it important? It has huge impacts on **adolescent personal development** and **global public health** challenges.

Why in school? Many **cultural norms** deter **parents** from discussing sexuality with their offspring, and even when they do, adolescents may disregard their advice due to rebellion. Meanwhile, **peers** receive information likely from **unverified** sources in the first place. Thus, it is incumbent upon **educators** to offer students scientifically **accurate**, **unbiased** sex education information in a culturally sensitive manner.

Sex Education Worldwide

Sweden



US



First: the **first** country to mandate sex education in school

Effective: an exceptionally **low** HIV prevalence rate of just 0.08%

Interdisciplinary: integrating sex education into various **disciplines**

Reasons for Success: cultural **openness** and **normalization** of discussions about sex, the **flexibility** of the curriculum, and comprehensive teacher **training** programs

Problems: one of the **highest rates** of teenage pregnancy in the developed world. Less than **half** of all adolescents received any kind of instruction on **contraception** before their first sexual encounter.

Causes for Challenges: the policy climate that constantly **oscillates** between **abstinence-only** and **comprehensive** education. Recent trends show preferences for the former, which **hinders** the **provision** of essential **knowledge** to young people.

Developing Countries



East Asia



Common Issues: While policies and laws regarding sex education may **exist**, the presence of such frameworks does not guarantee comprehensive content or effective implementation. It often **lack depth**, **fail** to cover a **broad** range of topics, offer **insufficient teacher training**, and are introduced too **late** in the educational journey.

Context: deeply ingrained sexual **conservatism**—rooted in Confucianism and other philosophies that advocate for abstinence and uphold strict gender roles—often **hinders open discussions** on sex and sexuality

Status Quo: **focused on reproduction and disease prevention solely**

Sex Education in China



Social Context: Sex is traditionally viewed as a **sensitive topic** and should be **reserved** for **married** people rather than adolescents. However, in **recent years**, **policy** climate has become increasingly **open**.

(Founding of PRC) 1949	Initial development
(Cultural Revolution) 1966-1976	Significant challenges
(Reform & Opening Up) 1978	Reintroduced into public discourse
1988	Officially incorporated into school system
2011	Discussions of sexuality normalized
2020	Top-down intention for further enhancement

Rationale

Issues with Existing Curricula

Timing: In-depth sex education courses are **deferred** until **college**, notwithstanding the fact that sexual awareness typically arises earlier during puberty, let alone round **39.8%** of the population in China have **never** received **tertiary** education, making the situation worse.

Coverage: There is a notable **absence** of a **detailed** and **holistic** curriculum in K-12 sector. The few existing content is often **diluted**, given **lower priority**, or even **omitted** altogether.

Evidence from Stakeholder Testimonies

Pilot Location: **Shanghai** is selected for its development, international outlook, liberal political atmosphere, and cultural diversity.

Methods: **Semi-structured** interview + **Top-down** coding

Participants: **7 triads** stakeholders (students, parents, and teachers) from **7 different high schools** recruited through **snowball sampling**

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

Triad	Student				Parent				Teacher				Marital Status	
	Gender	Age	Grade	School	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Gender	Age	Subject	Education		Years of Teaching
A	Male	17	12th	Public	Female	42	Bachelor	Manager	Female	33	Psychology	Master	10	Married (1 child)
B	Female	16	11th	Public	Female	47	Bachelor	Lawyer	Female	32	Psychology	Master	7	Married (0 child)
C	Male	17	11th	Public	Male	50	Bachelor	CEO	Female	25	Psychology	Master	1	Single
D	Male	17	11th	Specialized	Male	56	Associate	Unemployed	Female	30	Psychology	Master	6	Single
E	Female	17	11th	Private	Female	44	Bachelor	Chemical Engineer	Female	30	Psychology	Master	7	Married (1 child)
F	Male	15	10th	International	Female	44	Bachelor	Manager	Male	28	Biology	Master	4	Single
G	Male	17	10th	International	Female	52	Master	HR Manager	Female	24	Psychology	PhD Candidate	3	Single

Result:

- Supporting the **drawbacks** highlighted in **existing research**
- Identifying a **new issue**: the lack of **engaging pedagogy**
- Advocating for a **formal** educational setting to discuss sex education with **professional guidance**
- Raising **concerns** about how to appropriately **present sensitive** topics such as sexual activity and gender identity

Conceptual Framework

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)



Rationale: Comprehensive approach to sex education supports a **broader**, more **inclusive** discussion on sex-related topics, and is associated with **lower STI rates**, **fewer** instances of **adolescent sexual abuse**, and notable improvements in **gender equality** and **inclusion**. Its counterpart, abstinence-only approach, however, suffers from declining effectiveness due to adolescents' increasing access to diverse information sources.

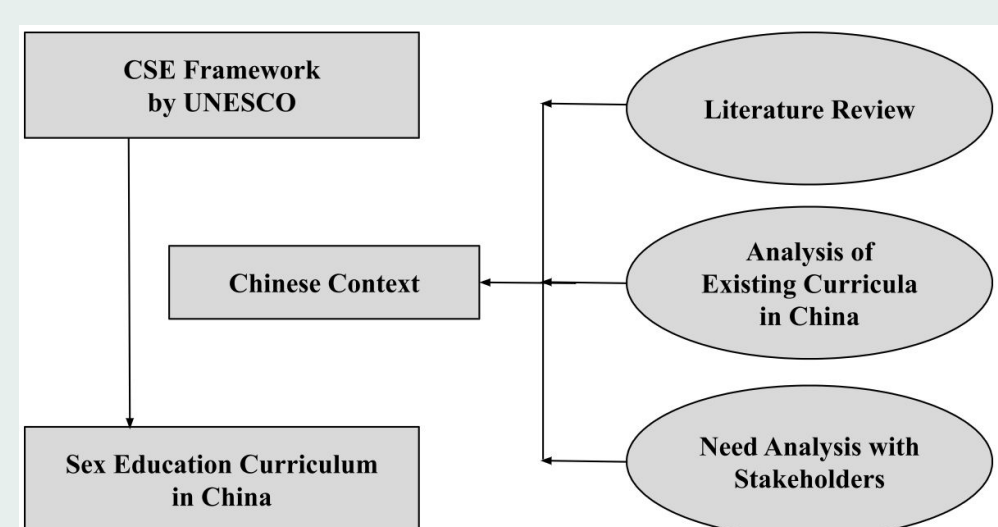
Key Content:

- 4 goals
- 8 concepts

Highlight:

- Gradual, incremental
- Comprehensive (ages 5 to 18)

Figure 1: How CSE is used for the curriculum



Curriculum

Overview

- Tailored for high school students aged **15-18** in China
- 8 modules**, together addressing the **8 key concepts** highlighted in UNESCO's CSE framework
- 40-minute class period
- One module per week, 8 weeks in total
- Optional one-on-one** sessions with school **counselors**

Activities and Projects

- Word cloud
- Role play
- Letter exchange
- Brainstorming
- Drawing
- Debate
- Risk assessment
- Thought museum activity
- Case analysis
- Handbook design
- Community-outreach project

8 Modules

- What is a **relationship**?
- Do you know your **human rights**?
- Gender** in today's society
- Human **body** and **body image**
- What do you know about **sexuality**?
- Sexuality and **wellbeing**
- Say no to **violence**
- Media** influence and information **sources**

Highlights

- Step by step **guidance** (no background needed on the teachers' side)
- Interactive** and **inductive**
- Engaging **multimedia** materials
- Various **hands-on** activities
- Thought-provoking** discussion prompts
- Community-based** project
- Learning-oriented** with mainly formative **assessment**

Contact

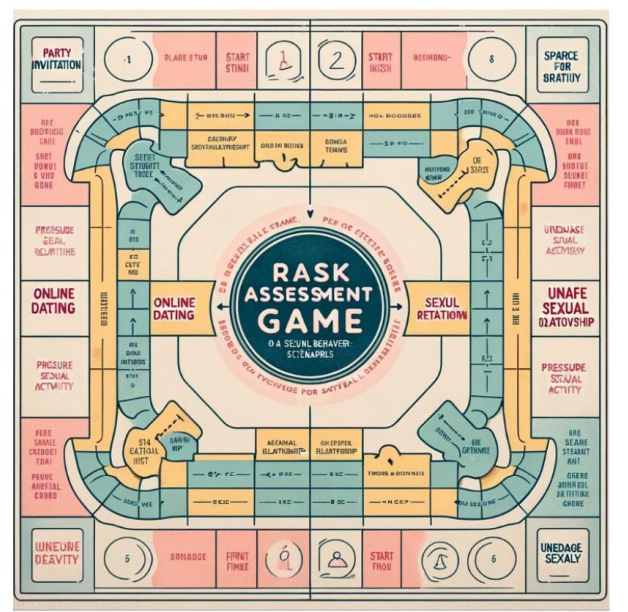
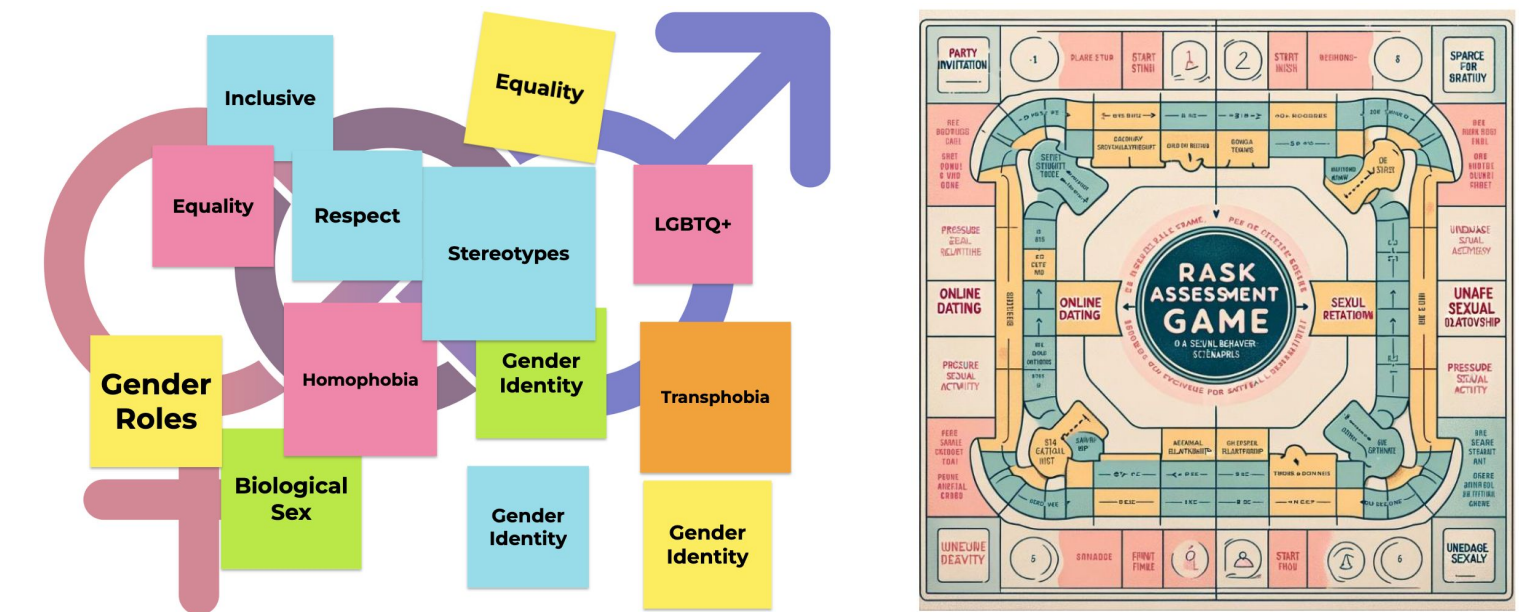
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Lesson Plan Week 4	
Module 4: Human Body and Body Image	Time: 40 minutes
Overview	
In this module, we will explore the common physical and emotional changes of people during puberty, and how that interplay with each other and ultimately form our body image. Through this module, we aim to equip learners with the knowledge and critical thinking skills needed to foster positive body image and promote healthy sexual behaviors.	
Learning Objectives	
Knowledge: Learners will know... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the common physical and emotional changes in puberty. the relations between self-consciousness and health, self-image, and behavior. 	
Attitude: Learners will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> understand and embrace the fact that people have various beauty standards. understand that it is normal to have physical and emotional changes during puberty. 	
Skill: Learners will know how to... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> challenge unrealistic standards about bodily appearance and accept their own body image appropriately. 	
Glossary and Key Concepts	
• Body Image	
Materials for Teachers	Materials for Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notebooks and writing instrument Computer and Internet Poster paper and markers Handouts of body image word tree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notebooks and writing instrument One picture of themselves at age of 8-10
Lesson Plan	
Warm-Up (5 minutes)	Distribute handouts of Body Image Word Tree (see example below) to each student and ask students to write down any word they know related to body image. Notes: Example of the Body Image Word Tree:

Topic 1: <i>The Image of the Body</i> (10 minutes)	Whole Group Sharing Activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present a bigger Body Image Word Tree on the blackboard. Ask students to take turns sharing one word from their own Word Tree. Summarize the concept of body image using the Word Tree on the blackboard. Lead a discussion of what is a healthy/unhealthy body image. Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Body Image: a person's perception, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes towards their own body.
Topic 2: <i>Physical Changes of People in Puberty</i> (10 minutes)	Move on to the discussion on physical changes of the people in puberty. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to show pictures of themselves in childhood. Engage in a 5-minute small group discussion where each student shares physical changes in their body from childhood to today. Summarize thoughts about physical changes in the large group based on the shared experiences and observations. Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The physical changes of the body in puberty for men: sperm production begins, more frequent erection, voice break and changes, muscles grow, and chests broaden, facial and chest hair, breasts grow. The physical changes of the body in puberty for women: growth spurt and weight gain, stretch marks, start to sweat more, ovulation, periods, or menstruation.

Topic 3: <i>The Emotional Changes of People in Puberty</i> (10 minutes)	Transition to Topic 3 about Emotional Changes of the People in Puberty. <p>Watch and Discuss Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite students to watch the video Puberty and Your Emotions about the common emotional changes happening in puberty. Ask students to discuss if they are facing similar changes. Ask students to brainstorm methods and strategies to maintain mental health. Possible aspects include screening, treatment, support, and intervention. Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For more resources on mental health, check out the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (in English and based on the American context) or the Hong Kong Mood Disorder Center (in Chinese and based on the Chinese context).
Closing (5 minutes)	Summarize both the physical and emotional changes during puberty and reflect upon the complex interplay of physical and emotional changes during adolescence. Then, re-emphasize the importance of having a healthy body image.
Assignments	
Emotional Changes Timesheet:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a timesheet to track the emotional changes of yourself every day over a week. Use the methods and strategies we discussed in the course to explain the changes and discuss how to better address them. Evaluation: Focus on students' level of exploration and reflections on their own emotions. Provide written feedback if necessary. 	
Formative Assessment Strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track student engagement and participation. Evaluate student responses to questions posed during in-class activities. 	
Notes for Teachers	
Building on the foundational biological knowledge of human bodies covered in middle school, this module aims to introduce the concepts of body image from a social perspective. It shifts the focus from biological knowledge to fostering a deeper comprehension of body perception, emphasizing the importance of challenging societal norms, and cultivating positive body image and self-esteem.	



Limitations

- Qualitative** nature (limited sample size)
- Snowball** sampling (may be biased)
- Limited direct access** to existing sex education **materials** in China (since the author based on the US)
- Preliminary** and **pilot** curriculum (exclusively targeted at high school students in Shanghai)

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