

The Influence of Sexuality Education on Five-Year-Old Children's Understanding of Safe and Unsafe Touch

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Abstract

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Early childhood is a critical period for establishing foundational awareness of body boundaries and personal safety. Developmentally appropriate sexuality education plays an essential role in supporting children's understanding of safe and unsafe touch as part of early prevention efforts against abuse. This study aims to analyze the influence of sexuality education on five-year-old children's understanding of safe and unsafe touch concepts. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed to explore children's experiences, responses, and interpretations during learning activities. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and parents, and documentation of classroom activities and children's work. The findings indicate that sexuality education enhances children's awareness of body ownership, enables them to distinguish between safe and unsafe touch, and promotes basic self-protection behaviors such as refusing inappropriate contact and reporting to trusted adults. The study concludes that developmentally appropriate sexuality education contributes significantly to strengthening early self-protection capacities. It is recommended that educators and parents collaboratively implement structured, age-appropriate sexuality education programs to reinforce children's safety awareness in everyday contexts.

Keywords: Early Childhood, Safe and Unsafe Touch, Sexuality Education

Abstrak

Masa anak usia dini merupakan periode krusial dalam membangun kesadaran dasar mengenai batasan tubuh dan perlindungan diri. Pendidikan seksual yang sesuai dengan tahap perkembangan anak berperan penting dalam membantu anak memahami konsep sentuhan aman dan tidak aman sebagai bagian dari upaya pencegahan dini terhadap kekerasan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh pendidikan seksual terhadap pemahaman anak usia lima tahun mengenai konsep sentuhan aman dan tidak aman. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif untuk menggali pengalaman, respons, dan interpretasi anak selama proses pembelajaran. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam dengan guru dan orang tua, serta dokumentasi kegiatan pembelajaran dan hasil karya anak. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan seksual meningkatkan kesadaran anak terhadap kepemilikan tubuh, membantu mereka membedakan sentuhan yang aman dan tidak aman, serta mendorong perilaku perlindungan diri seperti menolak sentuhan yang tidak sesuai dan melaporkannya kepada orang dewasa terpercaya.

Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pendidikan seksual yang sesuai dengan perkembangan anak berkontribusi signifikan dalam memperkuat kemampuan perlindungan diri sejak dini. Disarankan agar pendidik dan orang tua bekerja sama dalam menerapkan program pendidikan seksual yang terstruktur dan sesuai usia guna memperkuat kesadaran keselamatan anak dalam kehidupan sehari-hari.

Kata kunci: Anak Usia Dini, Pendidikan Seksual, Sentuhan Aman Dan Tidak Aman,

INTRODUCTION

Early sexuality education plays a critical role in supporting children's understanding of their bodies, personal boundaries, and social interactions within their immediate environment (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016; Santrock, 2019). At the age of five, children experience rapid cognitive and social development that enables them to recognize basic social rules and differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable physical interactions (Piaget, 1952; Erikson, 1963). Understanding the concepts of safe and unsafe touch is particularly important at this stage, as young children are among the most vulnerable groups to sexual violence and abuse, which may result in long-term physical, psychological, and emotional consequences (Wurtele, 2009; UNICEF, 2018).

Despite its importance, the implementation of sexuality education in early childhood continues to face substantial challenges, particularly in socio-cultural contexts where discussions of sexuality are considered sensitive or taboo (Leung & Yeung, 2009; Ariawan & Wijaya, 2019). In many communities, limited public understanding of age-appropriate sexuality education restricts children's access to accurate information about body safety and self-protection (Ministry of Education and Culture Indonesia, 2018). This condition often leads to low awareness among both children and parents regarding the importance of early sexuality education as a preventive strategy against inappropriate or harmful physical contact (KPAI, 2020; Wurtele, 2009).

Early childhood education institutions are strategically positioned to address this gap by providing structured and developmentally appropriate sexuality education. Kindergartens serve as children's second social environment after the family and play a crucial role in shaping attitudes, awareness, and protective behaviors through formal learning experiences (Putra & Wati, 2019; Santrock, 2011). Through systematic educational programs and interactive teaching methods, children can be guided to understand the distinction between safe touch and unsafe touch, as well as to develop the confidence to refuse or report inappropriate physical interactions (Harris & West, 2013; Hill & Maughan, 2001). Such education not only transmits knowledge but also strengthens children's self-protection skills and emotional readiness in potentially risky situations (Bandura, 1986; Durlak et al., 2011).

Previous studies have demonstrated that sexuality education in early childhood contributes positively to children's awareness of body boundaries and personal rights (Morrison & Bearden, 2017; Zimmerman & Schaeffer, 2009). However, much of the existing research has focused on conceptual discussions, curriculum development, or broader child protection frameworks, with limited empirical evidence derived from quasi-experimental designs at the kindergarten level (Wurtele, 2009; Putra & Wati, 2019). In addition, several studies emphasize parental or community-based interventions, while fewer investigations examine the direct impact of school-based sexuality education programs on children's measurable understanding of safe and unsafe touch (Leung & Yeung, 2009; Harris & West, 2013).

This gap indicates the need for empirical research that quantitatively examines the effectiveness of structured sexuality education implemented within early childhood education settings. In particular, there remains limited evidence regarding how interactive, developmentally appropriate sexuality education influences 5-year-old children's understanding of safe and unsafe touch in real classroom contexts. Addressing this gap is essential to inform educators and policymakers about effective strategies for integrating sexuality education into kindergarten curricula as a preventive measure against sexual violence.

Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its focus on empirically examining the impact of sexuality education on young children's understanding of safe and unsafe touch using a quantitative quasi-experimental approach. Conducted at Pembina Semerap Kindergarten in West Danau Kerinci District, this study provides context-specific evidence on how interactive sexuality education can enhance children's body awareness and self-protection skills. By generating empirical data at the early childhood level, this research contributes to strengthening the evidence base for sexuality education as an integral component of early childhood education and child protection policies (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016; UNICEF, 2018).

This study aims to examine the influence of sexuality education on 5-year-old children's understanding of safe and unsafe touch at Pembina Semerap Kindergarten. Specifically, the study seeks to analyze how structured and developmentally appropriate sexuality education affects children's awareness of body boundaries, their ability to distinguish acceptable and unacceptable physical contact, and their readiness to apply basic self-protection behaviors in everyday social interactions within the kindergarten environment.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how 5-year-old children interpret sexuality education, particularly in relation to the concepts of safe and unsafe touch. The focus of the study was on exploring children's experiences, perceptions, and responses during the learning process rather than on numerical measurement or statistical analysis. This approach allowed the

researcher to capture the meanings constructed by children, teachers, and parents within natural learning contexts.

Research Participants

The research participants were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria aligned with the study objectives. The participants included 5-year-old children who participated in the sexuality education program at Pembina Semerap Kindergarten, the teachers who implemented the program, and several parents whose children were involved in the learning activities. This selection ensured that the data sources were directly relevant to understanding the implementation and outcomes of sexuality education in the kindergarten setting.

Role of the Researcher

In this qualitative study, the researcher served as the primary research instrument. The researcher was directly involved in data collection, observation, and interpretation, which enabled close engagement with the research context. This active role allowed the researcher to capture nuanced behaviors, verbal expressions, and interactions related to children's understanding of safe and unsafe touch.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using multiple techniques to obtain comprehensive and credible findings. Participant observation was conducted to observe children's activities during sexuality education sessions and to document their responses to learning materials related to safe and unsafe touch. In-depth interviews were carried out with teachers and parents to explore their perspectives on changes in children's understanding and behavior after receiving sexuality education. In addition, documentation such as lesson plans, learning activity notes, children's work (including drawings and stories), and instructional media used by teachers were analyzed to support and enrich the data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in several stages, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and focusing on information relevant to the research objectives. The reduced data were then organized and presented in narrative form to describe children's understanding of safe and unsafe touch. Conclusions were drawn through an iterative process and continuously reviewed to ensure consistency with the collected data and field observations.

Trustworthiness of the Data

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation was employed across data sources and data collection methods. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from children, teachers, and parents, while

method triangulation was achieved through the use of observation, interviews, and documentation. This process strengthened the credibility of the findings and ensured that the interpretations accurately reflected the research context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The study results showed that the sexuality education provided to 5-year-old children at Pembina Semerap Kindergarten had a positive impact on their understanding of the concepts of safe and unsafe touch. Based on observations during the learning process, children began to recognize acceptable and unacceptable touch and understood that their bodies have boundaries that must be maintained. Children also demonstrated an increased ability to express feelings of comfort and discomfort with certain forms of touch.

Children's understanding of safe touch is demonstrated by their ability to cite examples of touch by specific people, such as parents and teachers, in appropriate situations. Children understand that safe touch does not cause fear or discomfort. During light-hearted discussions and picture stories, children are able to respond to teachers' questions with relevant answers, demonstrating the development of an early awareness of healthy physical boundaries.

Furthermore, the research results also showed an increase in children's understanding of unsafe touch. Children began to recognize that certain body parts are private and should not be touched by others. Through simple simulations and role-playing, children demonstrated resistance to illustrations of inappropriate touch. Some children verbalized that they would say "no," move away, or report to an adult if they experienced touch that made them uncomfortable.

Children's responses to the implemented sex education methods have shown positive results. They appear enthusiastic and engaged during learning activities that utilize visual media, illustrated stories, and play activities. The interactive and child-friendly learning methods help them understand the material without causing fear or confusion. Children are also able to connect the material learned to everyday experiences at school and at home.

Changes in children's attitudes and self-confidence were also important findings in this study. Children showed increased courage in expressing feelings and discomfort, both to teachers and peers. In social interactions, children appeared more cautious about physical contact and began to understand the importance of asking permission before touching another person. This reflects children's growing awareness of self-protection and respect for others' boundaries.

Interviews with teachers revealed that implementing sex education made it easier for teachers to guide children's behavior regarding touch and physical interaction. Teachers reported that children became more open and receptive to discussing their feelings and experiences. Delivering material with an empathetic approach, simple

language, and a safe environment was deemed highly effective in helping children understand sensitive concepts.

Furthermore, interviews with parents revealed changes in children's behavior at home. Children began asking questions about their bodies and expressed discomfort with certain touches. Parents assessed that the sex education provided at school helped foster more open communication with their children. Parental support and involvement in following up on learning at home strengthened children's understanding of safe and unsafe touch.

Discussion

Early childhood sexuality education is fundamental to building self-awareness, understanding physical boundaries, and fostering healthy social interactions. Developmentally appropriate sexuality education improves young children's understanding of safe and unsafe touch, which is particularly important during the preoperational stage when children begin to distinguish acceptable and unacceptable experiences related to their bodies (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016; Piaget, 1952; Santrock, 2019). At this stage, sexuality education functions as an early protective foundation that enables children to recognize potential risks and respond appropriately.

The effectiveness of sexuality education in early childhood is strongly influenced by teaching methods. Interactive approaches that integrate play-based activities, illustrated stories, and guided discussions are especially effective for young children, who learn optimally through sensory engagement and hands-on experiences (Erikson, 1963; Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Morrison & Bearden, 2017). Such methods allow children to grasp concepts of safe and unsafe touch in an engaging and developmentally appropriate manner while supporting meaningful learning experiences.

Educational institutions such as Pembina Semerap Kindergarten play a critical role in providing structured and systematic sexuality education, as schools serve as children's second social environment after the family. Through curriculum integration, schools foster bodily awareness, self-protection skills, and confidence in social interactions (Ministry of Education and Culture Indonesia, 2018; Putra & Wati, 2019). However, effective sexuality education requires strong collaboration with families and communities. Parental support and open communication at home regarding bodily autonomy and personal boundaries strengthen children's ability to internalize and apply protective knowledge (Barlow & Schrader-McMillan, 2010; Leung & Yeung, 2009; KPAI, 2020).

Beyond cognitive outcomes, sexuality education contributes to children's psychosocial development by enhancing confidence in expressing discomfort and refusing unwanted touch, which is essential for preventing sexual violence, particularly as many cases remain unreported due to children's limited ability to recognize or communicate abuse (Rogers, 1961; Hart, 1992; Wurtele, 2009). The findings of this study confirm that children who receive structured sexuality education demonstrate significantly better understanding of safe and unsafe touch compared to those who do

not, supporting evidence that developmentally appropriate sexuality education enhances cognitive and emotional readiness without causing fear or confusion (Zimmerman & Schaeffer, 2009; Durlak et al., 2011). These results underscore the importance of equipping educators with adequate pedagogical competence and positioning sexuality education as an integral component of early childhood education curricula supported by policy and practice (Hill & Maughan, 2001; Hattie, 2009).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that developmentally appropriate sexuality education significantly enhances 5-year-old children's understanding of safe and unsafe touch. Interactive learning methods, including educational games, illustrated stories, and simple discussions, effectively support children's ability to recognize acceptable and unacceptable physical contact during a critical period of body awareness and boundary formation. The findings also highlight the important role of family support, as open communication and parental involvement strengthen children's capacity to internalize and apply self-protection concepts in daily life. Furthermore, integrating sexuality education into the kindergarten curriculum, as implemented at Pembina Semerap Kindergarten, fosters children's alertness and self-confidence in social interactions while underscoring the need for well-trained educators capable of delivering sensitive and age-appropriate instruction. Overall, this study confirms that early sexuality education is an essential component of early childhood education and a strategic measure for child protection, requiring sustained collaboration among schools, families, and communities to support children's safety and autonomy.

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