



Viewpoint

## **New education policy on sex education in schools: Inhibitions**

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### **Abstract**

The inhibitions in talking about sexual energies to adolescents and imparting sex education in schools are like widening the dark zone of confusion and ignorance among young minds. This is how the whole concept of sex education is dealt by the educational system in India. The New Education Policy (2020) seems to still be in its inhibition zone since the stringent efforts needed to impart “sex education” among adolescents in schools failed to get any desired attention in the policy framework. The present paper is an initiative from the author to bring certain issues and concerns to the teachers, administrators and policy makers in the implementations and inclusion of “sex education curriculum” with reference to New Education Policy.

### **Introduction**

The New Education Policy (2020) envisages a new vision and perspective on education in the light of all round development of the child in the near future, but the initiation of the present paper by the investigator was to analyze why the policy has still certain

inhibitions in discussing certain issues of sex education and sexuality in the curriculum.<sup>[1]</sup>

The complexity involved in discussing the sexual energy in human lives sometimes creates more confusion and hesitation due to the socio-cultural, moral, religious, political dimensions involved in its interpretations. The more we are unclear about our energies and psychological needs, the more it creates stressful and frustrating moments in our life and society. It was held that due to too much repression of sexual feelings, children develop certain complexes, which can hinder the personality of a child.<sup>[2]</sup>

The stigmatized hesitation from one generation to another is being transmitted and

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no one is speaking about the issue openly. Though the problems of HIV-AIDS, sexual and reproductive health, and population explosion are included in the current curriculum with reference to present scenario, the issues concerned with prostitution, rapes, sexual violence, porn, and sexual and reproductive health are still not discussed with an open mind.

### Sex education

Sexuality education is a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs, and values about self-identity, interpersonal relationships, and intimacy issues during sexual development, reproductive health issues, affection, intimacy, body image, and gender roles. It addresses the biological, socio-cultural, psychological and spiritual dimensions of sexuality from the cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains, including the skills to communicate effectively and make responsible decisions.<sup>[3]</sup>

Comprehensive sex education is now, in its broadest sense, includes understanding bodies and boundaries, relationships and respect, diversity, and consent along with the knowledge on unwanted pregnancies and better safe sex practices. It also includes the right to education, the right to health, the right to sexuality, the right to non-discrimination, and the right to privacy-all of which impact the right to life.<sup>[4]</sup>

Sex education includes- “The physiological, psychological and sociological developmental process experienced by an individual; the development of interpersonal and intra-personal skill to communicate respectfully and effectively to reduce health risks and choose healthy behaviours; Health care and prevention resources; the development of meaningful relationships and avoidance of exploitative relationships; Understanding of the influence of family, peers, community and media throughout life on healthy sexual relationships”.<sup>[5]</sup>

Another term used for sex education is Sexuality Education or Sex and Relationships Education.

### Components of sex education in the curriculum

The components of sex education usually create awareness among youth and protect them against the risk of pregnancy, STDs, and HIV. In these programs the educators, parents, and policymakers tried to avoid emotional misconceptions about sex education and focused instead on the importance of implementing more innovative programs, programs with proven effectiveness. Sex education mostly incorporates the following components -

- ◆ Both genders must have knowledge and understanding about the body's reproductive system, its structure, functioning, proper care, the process of fertilization, puberty and the associated characteristics.
- ◆ Understanding of the differences in the growth patterns of both the genders in terms of their interests, abilities, anatomy and how both the genders react emotionally and physically to these changes and differences.
- ◆ Opening up about the misconceptions and queries related to sexual development.
- ◆ Understanding of differences in masculine and feminine behaviour patterns.
- ◆ Understanding the approved prevailing general behavioural patterns for both the genders by social customs of the region.
- ◆ Discussing pre-natal and post-natal development, pubertal changes, embryology, the cause and nature of physical changes, methods of adjusting to these changes, and channeling the sexual energy.

- ◆ Adopting strategies of prevention from venereal diseases. of various contraception methods on health.
- ◆ Understanding the benefits of physical exercise, recreational activities and utilisation of leisure time. In the present educational set up, the seven basic components of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) curriculum must be covered. [4] These seven components are briefly discussed in
- ◆ Discussions on the uses and side effects

**Table 1: Components of sex education in India**

Sr. No.	Components	Description
1.	Gender	Differences between gender and sex, gender roles, perception of masculinity and femininity, changing norms of the society, gender-based discrimination; inequalities; violence, and stereotyping of their role in society.
2.	SRH & HIV	Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), sexuality, life cycle, human anatomy, reproductive process, menstrual hygiene management, contraception methods; risk factors in abortion; Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) & HIV(Human Immunodeficiency Virus).
3.	Sexual Rights & Sexual Citizenship	Sexual Health; Emotional well-being; Human Rights and Related Barriers; available services; resources, its accessibility in relation to the dynamic nature of sexuality and culture.
4.	Pleasure	It talks about human biology and emotions behind the human sexual response, sexual pleasure, sexual well-being, meaning of CONSENT in sexual activities. Understanding sexuality and acceptance about sexual gratification.
5.	Violence	Types of sexual violence and sexual abuse in relationships or in general ; Rights, laws and other support options available to seek justice in case of violations of sexual rights or right to life
6.	Diversity	Understanding and recognising the socio, economic, political, cultural, religious background of the individual with reference to his/her sexual orientation and enriching his/her outlook in positive self acceptance
7.	Relationships	Empowering and strengthening communication skills and emotional quotient for healthy relationships.

Out of the seven components briefly mentioned above, the present curricula has positively responded to address Gender Roles; SRH & HIV; Diversity, and Relationships but the need to create more awareness among students about the contraception methods, risk factors in abortion, sexual rights & sexual citizenship, sexual pleasure, sexual violence and legal perspective on sexual abuse requires more benevolent insights from the New Education Policy.

The Reproductive and Child Health Programme (RCH-1& 2) was launched by the Government

of India in 1997 and 2005, respectively, and some of the important segments have been well incorporated by the NCERT curriculum in the form of issues and content on Reproductive Health-problems and strategies; Population explosion & Birth Control; Medical Termination of Pregnancy, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs); Infertility etc. [6]

**Review of literature**

The studies done by Rani; Toor; Qasim; Subburaj; Halder; Lalnunfeli and Malsawmi; Francis more or less discussion about the

attitude of teachers (whether pre-service and in-service; rural or urban; male or female); parents; community etc. towards imparting sex education to school students.<sup>[7-13]</sup> All these studies were mostly concluding favourable positive attitude of teachers towards imparting sex education in schools. Several articles and views were shared on the print media and social media regarding the narrow approach taken by the New Education Policy on sex education.<sup>[1]</sup> Chkraborty and Mishra discussed the lack of sex education in India and its growing importance in the Digital Era.<sup>[14]</sup> The investigator found the research were missing on the inhibitions of the New Education Policy towards sex education.

### The dilemma of sex education

Indeed, people are now more open toward sex education, and they are considering the issues of sex education rationally and logically that this will reduce the spread of HIV by promoting safer sex. But Pasricha observed that several Indian states are still in a dilemma over this issue where they believe that sex education will ruin Indian culture by corrupting young minds.<sup>[15]</sup> The dilemma of imparting sex education lies in the fact that policymakers doubt that parents may think that this will lead to the exploration of sexual activities in the form of watching porn among children. The socio-cultural, moral, political and, religious, spiritual outlook of the masses of the particular nation holds an important factor in imparting sex education among children and adults in this regard.

### How education policies and educational organizations have taken a stand for sex education?

- ◆ While discussing the New Education Policy, Malik and Shukla argued that “not only does the word sexuality find no mention in the document ‘sex education’ has been subsumed under the component of ethical and moral reasoning. An interdisciplinary engagement with gender

has been made in the post National Curriculum Framework (NCF-2005), in NCERT Textbooks of primary Environmental Studies (EVS); and elementary & secondary Social Sciences textbooks. Meaning of good and bad touch appears in Class IV textbooks of EVS, but a detailed discussion on anatomy of human bodies, genitals, sexual and reproductive health only begins by class VIII- through the medicalized and disembodied content of the Science Textbooks”.<sup>[16]</sup>

- ◆ The stand of NCERT in this regard is also not different as observed by Sharma in her article: “The NCERT, which is the central government agency that provides study material to schools, is currently reviewing its syllabus. It plans to include a revised version of sex education imparted to children in schools. Children from classes 1 to 5 will be taught about sexual abuse in detail through educational films and counselors, as part of the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) revised syllabus curriculum. The NCERT has developed a curriculum titled Health and Physical Education for classes 1 to 12, which has been prescribed to all schools. While most schools follow only the syllabus, some schools have also appointed well-trained counselors for teenage children”.<sup>[17]</sup>
- ◆ The Adolescent Education Programme (AEP), 2005, as introduced by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)/ National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), in partnership with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and NCERT, was implemented in selected government and private schools affiliated with Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).<sup>[18,19]</sup>
- ◆ The Ministry of Health and Family

Welfare in India has also launched the RMNCH+A, 2014 program and Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakaram (RKSK), 2014, which provides counselling services to adolescents and young people via trained counsellors and peer educators to consider their reproductive health strategies and pre-post natal care measures.<sup>[20,21]</sup>

However, this gradually narrowed down the basic components of sex education to sexual and reproductive health, puberty, contraception, RTI/STI, sex, first pregnancy safeguards, and sexual abuse or sexual rights violations. Students are still not given the required freedom to discuss their sexual orientations, sexual citizenship, sexual rights, gender identities, sexual pleasure, and sexual diversity, the things where teachers have to shed their inhibitions at the school level. India is one of the countries where the legalization of people with different sexual orientations under Article 377 has been decriminalized, and special rights have been given. But how much the school students can discuss the same openly in schools is still a question mark on imparting Sex Education in schools.

### **Breaking an ice to open up about sex education?**

Today, the question is not who will impart sex education to students. Rather how, the parents, teachers, and counselors will open up comfortably about the issues of menstruation, ovulation, conception, childbirth, nocturnal emissions in boys, genital organs, sexual matters, biological and physiological changes etc., that create anxiety among adolescents.

### **Inhibitions of the new education policy and stakeholders of the education system**

The policy's inhibition is that it not discussing the role of stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, administration, policymakers, educationists, print and social media, etc.) and barriers (student, teachers, parents, administration,

policymakers, community, etc.) in making the Sex Education as a comprehensive program for the overall development of the student.

### **How new education policy is failing in inclusion of the sex education in schools?**

The New Education Policy is nowhere in discussing and promoting that sex education can be important in enhancing young people's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour towards sex.<sup>[1]</sup> The imparting of sex education in schools is still a 'selected content', which is sometimes termed School-based Sex-education. The policy must have included sex education and sexuality in the school curriculum so that it

- ◆ Focuses on reducing specific risky sexual behaviours among adolescents.
- ◆ Can influence students' sexual choices and behaviour in life.
- ◆ Can provide the awareness regarding the risks associated with unprotected sexual activities and options available for contraception and birth control.
- ◆ Can provide strategies for how to deal with peer and other social pressures.
- ◆ Can provide opportunities to practice Life Skills like communication, negotiation and assertion skills in matters related to sex.
- ◆ Can provide a variety of teaching and learning approaches to teachers to engage young people and help them to channelize their sexual energies positively and constructively.
- ◆ It can help teachers to understand the notions of sexuality concerning young people's age, experience, and social, economic, cultural, and religious background with rationality.
- ◆ Can provide support through training or consultation modules to teachers and

other sex educators regarding how to impart sex education in schools.

- ♦ Can inform the adolescents about laws about sexual rights, human rights like the right to privacy, right to marry, right to choose life partners etc.; Cyber Laws, Laws concerned with sexual violence: rape, child trafficking, porn, eve teasing, sexual abuse etc. and information about Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POSCO) Act, 2012. The prevention strategy from Laws will give a holistic view to adolescents about their rights and duties towards society's development.

Since the complex issues pertaining to divorces, problems of single parent, extra marital affairs, marital rape etc are associated with sex education, these problems can be slowed down if the students have been acquainted with the right sex education curriculum.

**Recommendations for future policy makers concerning sex education**

1. The concept of gender equality, gender-based violence, human rights must be explained to adolescents.
2. The issue of Sexual and Reproductive Health must be tackled in qualitative and non-judgmental ways.
3. The evaluation, feedback, follow up, reviews, or revision of each policy or strategy must be incorporated to implement Comprehensive Sexuality Education.
4. The accessibility to counseling services for adolescents must be available offline and online.
5. Evolve parents and society in sensitizing the issues related to sexual health and decision-making.
6. Introducing training and sensitization programs for teachers, counsellors,

- experts, and administrative departments to formulate the curriculum and education policies regarding sex education.
7. Use social media to reach adolescents who need privacy in discussing matters or queries related to sex.
8. Further research and studies must be done on the policies effectiveness and implementation.
9. Involving NSS/NCC/Scout units or groups or societies awareness for informing and creating awareness about AIDS and other sexual diseases.
10. Incorporating Life Skills Modules at each stage of education.
11. Adequate resources be generated in the form of manpower or finances,
12. Imparting sex education must be under the guidance of teachers, parents, and trained sex educators.
13. There must be some specific strategies and methods while imparting sex education by school authorities, which will deliberately put all the teachers, parents, and students in a trustful and healthy relationship.
14. There must be an understanding among teachers and parents that young ones need guidance and direction in developing self-assurance and confidence when dealing with sex-related questions.
15. Sex education should acquaint children with their sexual energies and be appreciative of the attributes and capacities of the other gender's sexual energies.
16. Sex education must create an understanding that sexual energy is one of the positive and creative parts of life, and its proper channelization leads to a healthier personality.

**Conclusion**

The New Education Policy must have thought along the lines of Mahatma Gandhi that the Sex Education that I stand for must have for its object the conquest and sublimation of the sex passion. Such education should automatically serve to bring home to children the essential distinction between man and brute, to make them realize that it is man's special privilege and pride to be gifted with the faculties of head and heart both, that he is a thinking no less than a feeling animal as the very derivation of the word shows, and to renounce the sovereignty of reason over the blind instincts is, therefore to renounce a man's estate.<sup>[22]</sup>

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