



Teaching for impact: exploring pedagogical approaches in sexuality education in South African rural schools

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Abstract

The effectiveness of sexuality education programmes depends on teachers' approaches to curriculum delivery. The effectiveness of sexuality education among school-going adolescents could be enhanced if teachers' pedagogical approaches are understood and supported by all stakeholders. This study determined the approaches used for delivering sexuality education curricula at the selected rural schools from learners' perspectives. Leveraging a phenomenological lens, this study explored rural learners' lived experiences of sexuality education programme in their schools located in King Cetshwayo district, South Africa. Focus group interviews were conducted in 2020 in nine rural high schools. Eighty-four learners were purposively sampled to participate in the study. Transcribed data from the focus group interviews was analysed using the interpretative phenomenological analysis framework and the Information-Motivation-Behavioral Skills (IMB) model. Findings revealed two approaches used by educators to deliver sexuality education in the research setting, namely, structured and unstructured learning approaches. The study additionally highlighted areas of the curriculum covered by educators in these rural-based schools. I recommend rigorous and continuous training of teachers on sexuality education curriculum contents and pedagogy to enhance the effectiveness of curriculum implementation in the research setting.

Keywords: Adolescent, learner, rural-based schools, sexuality education, teaching approaches.

Introduction

A school-based sexuality education programme is central to government plans to prevent new HIV infections among school-going adolescents (SANAC, 2017). However, despite its implementation, there are increased risky sexual practices among learners, as shown by the high number of teenage pregnancies and HIV prevalence among adolescents in rural areas (Govender et al., 2022; Statistics South Africa (StatsSA), 2022). In 2020, rural-based schools in the King Cetshwayo district accounted for 11% of all recorded cases of pregnant learners in KwaZulu-Natal (Office of the Premier – KwaZulu-Natal 2020), making it the district with the second highest number of pregnant learners. This suggests that the approaches used by teachers at these schools to deliver sexuality education may be ineffective, and if these approaches are not identified and addressed, sexuality education

programs may fail to achieve the desired outcomes. As a result, the incidence of adolescent pregnancy and HIV infection among students may continue to rise. This led the researcher to carry out the study aimed at exploring approaches used for sexual education from the perspectives of learners in rural-based schools in the King Cetshwayo district, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Literature review

A school-based sexuality education programme provides a structured platform for adolescents to acquire knowledge and skills needed for healthy decision-making about their sexuality, relationships and exploration of their own values and attitudes (Adekola & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2023; Panchaud, et al. 2019). A UNESCO (2015) review of sexuality education programmes in 48 countries indicate that various terms, such as “comprehensive sexuality education”, “relationship and sexuality education”

and “prevention education”, were used to describe sexuality education. For this study, the researcher used the term “sexuality education”, which embraces a holistic approach to sexuality education. In addition, Pattathil and Roy (2023) noted that sexuality education’s programming, delivery and implementation could be effective in both high- and low-resource settings.

Globally, there are two kinds of sexuality education programme, namely, abstinence-only sexuality education and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) (Chavula et al., 2022; Haberland & Rogow, 2015). In contrast with abstinence-only sexuality education, which only promotes sexual abstinence, CSE provides young people with holistic information on sexuality, condoms, reproduction, and contraception. However, Stacey’s (2016) reviews of four studies on abstinence-only sexuality education programmes found them to be ineffective. Guttmacher Institute (2023) and Santelli et al. (2017) agreed with the findings, citing several reasons why an abstinence-only sexuality education programme might be ineffective and harmful. The Guttmacher Institute’s (2023) report contends that, in addition to denying young people scientifically accurate information, abstinence-only sexuality education programmes reinforce harmful gender stereotypes and violate young people’s human rights by excluding or stigmatising those who are sexually active. According to Santelli et al. (2017), while abstinence may be theoretically effective, young people’s intentions to practice sexual abstinence frequently fail. An effective sexuality education should offer school-going adolescents scientifically accurate, age-appropriate, and contextually relevant information on sexuality, human rights, gender equality, the human body, relationships, decision-making, communication, and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) (Haberland & Rogow, 2015; UNFPA, 2015). These topics are categorised into essential concepts that mutually reinforce one another with the aim to equip young people with relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2018). However, Bonjour and Van der Vlught (2018) noted that not all curricula contents of sexuality education in different countries are comprehensive, and that all the components of South African school-based

sexuality education curricula are crucial to governmental strategies and programmes to promote adolescents’ wellbeing and total health (Cooper, De Lannoy & Rule, 2015). In addition, the key focus of SRH-related information in the sexuality education curriculum aims to address HIV transmission and prevention among young people through behavioural and biomedical strategies (Adekola, 2020; Fonner et al. 2014). A well-implemented sexuality education programme improved HIV prevention among learners by increasing knowledge, delaying sexual debut, increasing condom usage, improving self-efficacy for HIV protection, and reducing multiple sexual partners (Adekola & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2023; United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2016).

Sexuality education programmes will be effective if its curriculum delivery strikes a balance between sexual risk reduction and sexual pleasure (Glover & Macleod, 2016). In the same vein, its contents should be contextually relevant and address the needs of school-going adolescents, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach (Ramírez-Villalobos et al., 2021).

Approaches used for sexuality education

Keogh et al. (2020) posit that the success of sexuality education programmes depends on how well it is facilitated by educators in the classrooms. The literature review revealed that teachers used two main approaches, namely, structured and unstructured approaches, to deliver sexuality education lessons to learners in the classroom. Miller and Wu (2018) argue that integrating both approaches in sexuality education lessons can lead to achievement of the desired learning outcomes. Ogolla and Ondia (2019) note that both approaches would only be effective if they are participatory, context driven, and learner centred. Ngabaza and Shefer (2019) agree that using a participatory learning approach to deliver sexuality education in the classrooms will afford more space for learners’ constructive participation in sexuality education and allow adolescents’ voices to be heard.

Structured Approach

The structured learning approach is a conventional, structured teaching strategy that utilises various resources such as textbooks, scripted lessons from the Department of

Education, note writing, and formal demonstrations. Naganandini (2016) is of the opinion that a well-facilitated sexuality education lesson that utilises a structured teaching approach will address young people's behavioural problems and enhance adolescents' knowledge of SRH. A combination of different pedagogical skills, strategies and values like modelling, demonstration and explanation are key to successful teaching and learning during sexuality education lessons (McLain, 2018). Furthermore, Pareek, Santosh and Harindarjeet (2017) note that when a structured learning approach is learner focused, it can facilitate health-enhancing knowledge among learners. McIntyre (2020) concurs that using a structured teaching approach in sexuality education fosters SRH-related competence among young people. This approach also includes writing notes on the topics of interest, which helps learners to recall information and improve their comprehension ability (Chang & Ku, 2015). According to UNESCO (2015), a structured teaching and learning approach empowers school-going adolescents to explore their own sexuality with reference to their attitudes, values and skills.

Unstructured Approach

An unstructured learning approach involves using various strategies to facilitate open-ended classroom discussions where learners can freely express their diverse views on topics of interest. Bonjour and Van der Vlugt (2018) indicate that educators should engage learners by using arts, video, role-play, music, and so on during sexuality education lessons rather than relying only on the use of textbooks. Thiessen, Gluth and Corso (2013) posit that using an unstructured learning strategy in the classroom is necessary for adolescents' social and academic development. For instance, classroom discussion is one of the methods of the unstructured learning and teaching approach that promotes critical thinking skills and fosters collaboration among adolescents (Witherspoon, Sykes & Bell, 2016). Similarly, Haberland and Rogow (2015) argue that judgement-free classrooms are spaces where learners can exercise their freedom of expression, build critical thinking skills, promote their SRH and empower themselves to challenge the social contexts that undermine their SRH and wellbeing. Sharing of personal experiences by educators and

learners during lessons is another method of the unstructured approach that encourages active participation and personal reflection by young people regarding their own sexuality (Beyers, 2013). However, Nelson, Pettersson, and Emmelin (2020) highlight the importance of balancing teachers' and learners' values when sharing personal experiences, especially when teachers' experiences and values conflict with their learners'. Other methods of delivering learning content under the unstructured approach that are essential to learning and teaching sexuality education, as revealed by the literature review, include role play, visual explanation, and video shows (Erturk, 2015; Bobek & Tversky, 2016).

Therefore, I argue that balancing structured and unstructured teaching approaches while anchoring them in learner-centeredness is crucial for effective sexuality education. The blend of the two approaches could create a dynamic learning environment and comprehensive learning experiences that empower learners to actively engage, critically evaluate, and confidently navigate their sexual health and well-being.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that underpins this study is the Information-Motivation-Behavioral (IMB) Skills Model. The IMB model posits that its three key constructs, namely information, motivation, and behavioral skills, influence behavioural outcomes (Wang et al., 2020). In the context of sexuality education, information refers to scientifically accurate and age-appropriate knowledge about sexual health, while motivation encompasses factors like positive attitudes towards healthy sexuality and self-efficacy in making informed choices (Adekola & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2022). Sheikhsari et al. (2020) further explain that behavioral skills include communication, refusal strategies, and accessing healthcare services. Building on these points, Maasoumi et al. (2024) argue that by integrating the principles of the IMB model into the teaching of sexuality education programmes, educators could effectively promote positive sexual health outcomes among learners, regardless of the teaching approach they use in the classroom.

Methodology

Design

This is an interpretative phenomenological study aimed at understanding the approaches used to deliver the sexuality education curriculum in the research setting based on learners' lived experiences and perspectives. This design allows the researcher to gain in-depth insight into the shared experiences of the participants and to understand better the diverse contexts in which those experiences take place (Polit & Beck, 2017). I listened to the participants' self-described experiences and views on the sexuality education being offered to them in schools. Furthermore, in order to better understand the participants' experiences, I asked probing and clarifying questions.

Setting

To explore the implementation of sexuality education, the study took place in nine rural public schools within the King Cetshwayo district, where sexuality education is an integral part of the mandatory life orientation curriculum.

Sampling

The purposive sampling technique was used on senior-phase students in public schools in the research setting. The research was carried out in 2020. The population for this study was guided by the following criteria: the learner must be at least 14 years old and not older than 19 years, living in the research setting, could speak either or both English and IsiZulu fluently, be a registered Grade 10 or Grade 11 learner, be willing to be audio recorded and sign an informed assent in addition to parental consent to participate in the study. Thirty-five male learners and 49 female learners participated in the study. Regarding the sample size ($n = 84$ participants), the researcher was guided by data saturation as described by Saunders et al. (2018), who assert that data saturation occurs when new data obtained from participants repeat what was obtained from previous participants. Thus, new themes, ideas, and categories cannot be developed from newly obtained information. Likewise, Adekola and Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2023) explain that "data saturation" occurs when the information provided by study participants becomes redundant and

yields no new themes relevant to the study objectives.

Data Collection

Data were collected over five months, from March to July 2020, using focus group interviews. The researcher developed and used a focus group interview guide, which was refined through a pilot study to mediate the interview process. Guided by Qu and Dumay (2011), I asked central questions such as "Describe your experiences regarding the sexuality education curriculum being offered in your school" in all the focus group interviews.

In addition, the researcher probed and prompted the participants to obtain rich and detailed information from their shared experiences. All the focus group interview sessions with the participants were audio recorded and each session lasted about 90 to 120 minutes. Because some of the study data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, I strictly observed relevant safety measures described by Adekola and Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2023), such as wearing face masks, social distancing, hand washing, and conducting focus group interviews in well-ventilated settings.

Furthermore, I used an audio recorder of high quality for capturing participants' self-described experiences. This was necessary to enhance the participants' audibility while using face masks. The researcher used field notes to record their reflection on the process of data collection and to capture observations and non-verbal cues of the participants that were not captured by the audio recorder. I analysed the data as it was collected iteratively until saturation was reached.

Data Analysis

Within 48 hours, I transcribed verbatim all the audio-recorded data of each focus group interview into written text. Nine transcripts from the focus group interviews were analysed using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework as described by Noon (2018). The researcher also engaged an independent qualitative coder, who carried out independent analysis of all the transcripts. Following that, I compared the codes generated by our analysis to those generated

by the independent coder. The comparison and subsequent discussion resulted in the creation of a final table comprising three main themes, sub-themes, and relevant quotes from the transcripts of the focus group interviews.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, I was guided by Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for making research trustworthy, namely: credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Adekola & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2023). Ongoing member checking was conducted to enhance the credibility of the study by allowing participants to verify their perspectives and experiences were accurately recorded. In the same vein, some participants were given transcripts to confirm that the findings accurately captured and reflected their views. To enhance the study's dependability and confirmability, I used field notes to document information like dates, the exact locations, and times spent in the research setting. In addition, the researcher engaged colleagues to transcribe verbatim and independently the audio-recorded data; an independent expert coder was also used to analyse the data to obtain independent thematic categories. To ensure confirmability, the researcher compared these independently determined themes with their emergent themes and kept an audit trail of the detailed research process. To strengthen transferability, I provided comprehensive details and full descriptions of participants' biographic data and research context. Furthermore, in-depth descriptions of the research process, sample, study setting, and researcher's assumptions, including a robust and detailed description of the researcher's experiences during the focus group interviews, were provided as further enhancement of transferability.

Ethical consideration

To conduct the study, I applied for and received ethical clearance from the University of South Africa. Thereafter, we obtained permission from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education to use its schools. I discussed the study's purpose, nature, risks, limitations, and possible benefits to the participants. Furthermore, the learners were assured of their right to refuse participation if they so wished because their

participation in the group interview was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time without penalty.

In addition, participants' identities were protected by using pseudonyms in the transcribed data and reporting. Focus group interviews were conducted in suitable, comfortable and convenient venues to enhance confidentiality. I followed Sim and Waterfield's (2019) framework to address participants' concerns about their anonymity when conducting focus group interviews. Participants were made aware of the overt nature of focus group interviews as well as the difficulties in maintaining anonymity during the group interviews. The researcher emphasised the importance of participants' full commitment in order to ensure anonymity.

Prior to commencing group interviews, the researcher implemented informed consent procedures. This included offering participants the opportunity to decline participation if they were concerned about potential limitations to anonymity. Subsequently, participants confirmed their understanding and obligation to maintain confidentiality throughout the study. Signed assent and consent forms from the participants and their parents, respectively, were collected before they were allowed to participate in the study. All audio-recorded and transcribed data obtained during data collection were kept in a secure electronic folder to prevent unauthorised access.

Results

Besides the biographical details of the participants, the following themes emerged from the analysis of data, which shows the approaches used for school-based sexuality education delivery in rural-based high schools in the King Cetshwayo districts: (1) unstructured approach, (2) structured approach, and (3) curriculum content coverage.

Participants' Biographic Details

Sixty percent of learners who participated in the study were engaging in sexual activities, with about two-thirds of them reportedly having sexual intercourse with multiple partners in the previous three years. The majority of participants who engaged in sexual activities reported that they used condoms on a regular basis. However, 16% of the participants who were sexually active said

that they occasionally used condoms. Furthermore, at the time of the focus group interview, 5% of the study participants mentioned that they had been pregnant in the past, and 75% of the participants indicated they had previously used alcohol.

Theme 1: Unstructured Approach

The findings revealed that the sexuality education curriculum was implemented in the selected schools using unstructured teaching and learning methods, such as classroom discussion, one-on-one discussions with teachers, and sharing of experiences.

Classroom discussion

Participants mentioned classroom discussion as one of the teaching methods used by teachers during sexuality education lessons:

“We have topics that divide the class during class discussions, where everybody looks at it differently like abortions, sexual orientations and so on”. – (Pinky, female, 16 years old)

“I may say that sometimes it is not comfortable talking about sex with your teachers in front of other learners.” – (Sabelo, male, 17 years old)

Apart from classroom discussions, participants reported sharing experiences as another method used by teachers for teaching and learning sexuality education in their schools.

Sharing experience

A participant reflected on the sharing of personal experiences in the classroom by educators during sexuality education lessons:

“My teacher does not only teach from book but from experiences too. He shares his personal experiences and make us realise that most things are part of life”. – (Nomcebo, female, 17 years old)

Besides sharing personal experiences, participants indicated one-on-one discussion as another unstructured method of teaching sexuality education in their schools.

One-on-one discussion

The results show that one-on-one discussions between teachers and learners are another unstructured method of delivering the school-based sexuality education curriculum in the study setting. A participant explained how this approach enhanced learners’ understanding of lessons discussed in the sexuality education class:

“Yeah, our teachers give us opportunities to meet up for personal discussion and advice. So we can learn more if we don’t understand what was discussed in the class” – (Lulama, female, 16 years old)

This has the potential of building mutual trust between young people and their teachers, thus promoting learners’ confidence and the effectiveness of sexuality education in the study setting.

Theme 2: Structured Approach

In addition to the unstructured teaching approach, the findings of this study indicate that sexuality education teachers also used the structured approach to teach in the schools located in the research setting. This includes the use of scripted lessons, writing notes and guided steps by the educators during sexuality education lessons.

Scripted lessons

Participants in the study reported that their teachers used scripted lessons developed by the Department of Basic Education during Life Orientation lessons:

“My Grade 11 teacher is more comfortable. He always explains everything in detail to us from our Life Orientation textbook” – (Sithabile, female, 17 years old)

Several participants in this study perceived that their sexuality education teachers were not comfortable with certain topics in the scripted lessons; others felt that their teachers were generally comfortable using the scripted lessons. This revealed that teachers used structured scripted lessons to deliver sexuality education to school-going adolescents in the research setting.

Writing notes

The study also found that writing notes was one of the structured approach methods utilised by teachers for teaching sexuality

education to learners. This is indicated by the following excerpt from a participant:

“In some topics we discussed, and we write notes in the other topics. Our teachers know what they are doing”. – (Nene, male 16 years old)

Another participant felt their teacher focused more on writing notes than the discussion of the topics.

“My LO teacher is not saying anything to us; she will just write her notes without explaining the notes and just go like that”. – (Anele, female, 17 years old)

Guided steps

The results also indicate that sexuality education teachers guided learners through a set of instructions to facilitate lessons in the classroom. This was supported by the participant's quote below:

“There are some steps and instructions to follow in the classroom that make the discussion about sexuality education comfortable”. – (Kwanda, male, 18 years old)

Besides the approaches used by the educators, participants also explained the aspects of the sexuality education curriculum that were regularly emphasised and discussed by teachers during sexuality education lessons.

Theme 3: Content covered

The study found that sexuality education lessons focused on sexual diversity, sexual risk reduction and sexual activities in the schools located in the study setting.

Sexual risk reduction

It emerged from the data analysis of the participants' experiences that sexuality education teachers addressed learners' risky sexual behaviours during lessons. Participants indicated that they were taught sexual risk reduction by teachers during sexuality education lessons:

“We get taught about the risks of having unprotected sex and the consequences. It also educates us about HIV/AIDS and other STIs and importance of condom”. – (Sandisile, female, 17 years old)

Sexual activities

Apart from providing information about sexual risk reduction to young people, results indicate that learners also learnt about sexual activities. Participants mentioned that teachers provided them with information on sexual activities and pleasure during sexuality education lessons:

“Sexuality education provides us with knowledge and correct information about our bodies and how to have sexual intercourse and how we girls can prevent pregnancy.” – (Salema, female, 17 years old)

Sexual and gender diversity

Besides learning about sexual activities and pleasure, data analysis of participants' experiences showed that educators covered sexual and gender diversity aspects of the curriculum in the schools located in the study setting. Participants indicated that sexuality education in their schools provided them with information on sexual and gender diversity:

“Our teacher taught us to accept other people's sexual identities and no matter who they are but you can see she might really not be comfortable going into details.” – (Zama, female, 16 years old)

“We learned in LO about sexual diversity. My teacher explained that we all have equal rights in this country in spite of our sexual orientation. We don't go deep but she taught us about respect for everyone's rights.” – (Fakazi, male, 16 years old)

Discussion

This study determined that structured and unstructured approaches were used by educators to facilitate sexuality education programmes in the research setting. In addition, the study highlighted key areas of the curriculum emphasised by the teachers in the classroom during sexuality education lessons.

Unstructured approach

The study showed that the unstructured approach can reinforce learners' understanding of sexuality education scripted lessons, but if not facilitated properly, it may deviate from important

messages of the sexuality education curriculum. One of the unstructured approach methods used by educators in the study setting is classroom discussion. While some participants felt the use of classroom discussion made them comfortable and helped them to understand the topics of interest, others admitted facing difficulties during classroom discussions. This is in line with Witherspoon, et al. (2016), who described classroom discussion as a sustained exchange of information between learners and their teachers to cultivate learners' abilities and increase their understanding of topics being discussed. In addition, Phillips (2023) argues that classroom discussion is an important and critical approach to facilitating the learning process because it promotes collaboration and the development of critical thinking skills among learners. Apart from classroom discussion, the findings identified sharing of experiences as another unstructured approach method used by educators to facilitate sexuality education lessons in the study setting. This method encourages active participation and reflections by both educators and learners. This agrees with Beyers (2013), who explained that the use of a participatory and reflective learning approach in the classroom fosters an ideal climate for discussion of sexuality topics. However, in a recent Swedish study, Nelson et al. (2020) cautioned that the sharing of personal values and experiences by teachers could conflict with their learners' cultural and religious beliefs. Consequently, they call for maintaining a delicate balance between educators' values and learners' values when sharing personal experiences in the classroom. This balance must be struck without compromising the responsibility to provide learners with the adequate information needed to achieve SRH. The results also indicated that in the study setting, one-on-one discussions were another unstructured method used in teaching sexuality education in schools. This aligns with Cheetham's (2015) recommendation that learners should have one-on-one discussions as an option to engage with teachers whenever they want to make self-disclosures or share personal information in a school setting.

Structured approach

The study revealed that the structured approach used in the study setting involves the use of scripted lessons, writing notes and guided steps

by the educators. This is consistent with UNESCO (2015) reports which state that various structured approach teaching and learning methods were adopted to teach sexuality education and to provide learners with opportunities for self-exploration of their sexuality-related values, skills, and attitudes in other countries. The study showed that the use of prepared, scripted lessons issued by the Department of Basic Education is one of the structured approach methods used by teachers to teach sexuality education in the research setting. This agrees with UNFPA (2015) reports which indicated that scripted lessons were developed and used in East and Southern Africa to support school-based sexuality education. The reports also maintain that scripted lessons provide teachers with resources to implement sexuality education curricula effectively. While this study revealed that some educators were not comfortable using the prepared scripted lessons, a Ugandan study by De Haas and Hutter (2019) noted that teachers might feel discomfort from teaching scripted lessons when its messages conflict with their (the teachers') personal values and beliefs. This highlights the need to train teachers continuously in the use of scripted lessons in the classroom to improve the efficacy of the sexuality education program in the study setting.

Besides scripted lessons, the findings also indicate that writing notes during lessons is another structured approach method utilised by educators to teach sexuality education to school-going adolescents in the research setting. Özçakmak (2019) explains that note writing is an act of summarising important information on the topics being discussed for later use and creating external memories. The results indicated that some educators' use of note writing was not learner centred as they avoided discussion of topics of interest that were deemed uncomfortable and rather engaged in writing notes to keep the learners busy in class. The findings revealed that some learners in the research setting did not enjoy the benefits of writing notes because their educators do not discuss these notes which is contrary to Özçakmak's (2019) findings, who asserts that writing notes enhances learners' comprehension skills and prevents them from missing key information discussed during the lessons. This was supported by an earlier study conducted in Taiwan by Chang and Ku (2015). They reported that

writing notes promotes adolescents' abilities to comprehend and remember learnt information. The participants' views and experiences regarding note writing underscore the need for teachers to be trained in facilitation of learner-centred lessons on sexuality education when using both structured and unstructured approaches. Furthermore, the study showed that teachers used guided steps as another structured approach method to teach sexuality education in the research setting. Learners were guided by a set of instructions to discuss topics during sexuality education lessons. The researcher noted that a structured approach was more prevalent because most participants shared their experiences and perceptions about how their teachers taught them (or struggled to teach them) from textbooks or scripted lessons. Therefore, a quantitative study is recommended in the study setting to ascertain which of the approaches is more prevalent.

Content covered

The results indicated that sexual risk reduction, sexual activities, and sexual diversity were the topics recalled most by the participants as having been covered by the sexuality education teachers in the classrooms. This suggests that the curriculum coverage might not be comprehensive enough. The lack of comprehensiveness in curriculum implementation could be due to teachers' perceived responsibility to address the high rate of teenage pregnancy in the community as a result of unsafe sexual practices among school-age adolescents. This confirms Francis' (2013) argument that teachers' personal narratives or values influence their choice of sexuality education curriculum contents that they teach. The author maintains that some educators teach aspects of the sexuality education curriculum that enable them to give moral guidance to learners. Bonjour and Van der Vlugt (2018) concur that not all sexuality education programmes have comprehensive content. This is consistent with shared experiences of the participants in this study who explained that during sexuality education classes, teachers concentrated primarily on sexual risk reduction. Likewise, Glover and Macleod (2016) found that educators bombarded learners with messages of danger, disease, and potential risk, which support this finding. In addition, the results revealed that teachers provided information about sexual and gender diversity to learners

during lessons. The findings concur with Glover and Macleod (2016), who argue that sexuality education messages to learners should have balanced and broader views of sexuality and promote responsibility among learners. While Bonjour and Van der Vlugt (2018) highlighted sexual diversity, contraception, mutual consent, gender power imbalance, sexual pleasure and safe abortion as aspects of the sexuality education curriculum that are commonly skipped or only briefly discussed by teachers in the classrooms, this study found that educators in the research setting provided information on sexual diversity to their learners during lessons. Similarly, De Haas and Hutter (2019) found that only one-third of educators in Uganda incorporated a balanced view of the positive notion of sexuality and reduction of risky sexual activities in their lessons, while other teachers perceived that learners in their classes were too young for lessons on sexual activities.

While this study identified two main lesson delivery approaches, namely structured and unstructured, using the IMB model theoretical lens to interpret the findings of this study on teachers' approaches to sexuality education in rural South Africa raises more questions for further studies on this topic. Firstly, the IMB model examines whether each of these two teaching approaches focuses on its three constructs. It interrogates whether learners felt adequately informed on key sexual health topics and comfortable accessing further information through any of the teaching approaches. Additionally, it questions whether the teaching methods effectively motivate learners to engage with the study materials and develop positive attitudes towards sexual health. Furthermore, the model explores how each of these teaching approaches influences learners' perceptions of the learning environment, their feelings of comfort and judgment, and their self-reported motivation to learn more. Moreover, it investigates whether the approaches equip learners with the necessary skills to navigate their sexuality responsibly and foster behavioural competence. Crucially, the IMB model extends its gaze towards the educators themselves. Are they sufficiently equipped with both knowledge and motivation, along with essential pedagogical skills, to deliver both structured and unstructured lessons effectively? Guided by the IMB theoretical lens, we can move beyond identifying delivery methods

and gain a deeper understanding of the other influencing factors that impact the effectiveness of sexuality education in these rural schools. This comprehensive understanding can inform more targeted interventions and training programs for teachers, ensuring they possess the knowledge, skills, and motivation to deliver sexuality education that empowers learners to make informed and healthy choices.

Limitation of the study

The selection of participants in this study employed a purposive sampling technique, potentially excluding learners with differing experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, the study solely focused on the enrolled learners' viewpoints within the research setting, without incorporating parental or teachers' perspectives. Additionally, data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which could have influenced participants' expression of views due to pandemic-related anxiety. Hence, it's essential to consider these limitations when interpreting the study's findings.

Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of both structured and unstructured methods employed by educators to deliver sexuality education curricula in the research setting, I recommend rigorous and continuous training support for the teachers on the content of the sexuality education curriculum and pedagogy. The training should empower teachers to facilitate learner-centred and participatory lessons effectively, regardless of which approach they use in the classroom. I advocate for extensive curriculum content and pedagogical training for sexuality education teachers based on the IMB skills model to enhance their fidelity to curriculum implementation, their pedagogical efficacy, and their impact on learners' sexual health outcomes. Drawing from IMB skills model analysis, further studies are recommended to gain a deeper understanding of the two teaching approaches' impact on learners' sexual health knowledge, motivation, and behavioral skills.

Conclusions

The findings of this study established that teachers' approaches to implementing sexuality education programmes in their classrooms were

both structured and unstructured. The study revealed that educators utilised scripted lessons, guided steps, and note writing as part of the structured approach, while classroom discussions, one-on-one discussions, and sharing of personal experiences were used as unstructured approaches to deliver the sexuality education curriculum. This study found that both approaches in the research setting were not always effective because the lessons were not learner centred. In addition, the research findings showed that coverage of sexuality education curriculum content was not as comprehensive as stipulated in the Department of Basic Education curriculum policy statement. The study established that sexual risk reduction, sexual activities and sexual diversity were the topics regularly covered by the educators in the research setting while they skipped or rushed through other sensitive topics that made them uncomfortable during lessons. This study also found that there was a need for rigorous training of teachers on sexuality education curricula and pedagogy using the IMB skills theoretical framework.

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