

## Early Childhood Teachers' Understanding of Sex Education: A Descriptive Survey in Bandung

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### Abstract

*This study aims to analyze early childhood education (ECE) teachers' understanding of sex education by examining three key indicators: fundamental knowledge, attitudes, and the readiness of instructional media and learning materials. Using a quantitative descriptive approach, data were collected from ECE teachers via structured questionnaires and subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistics. Data were collected from 57 early childhood teachers in Bandung using a total sampling technique. The findings show that teachers' overall understanding of sex education falls into the moderate category. In terms of fundamental knowledge, 96% of teachers demonstrated a high level of conceptual understanding, with a mean score of 42.28 out of 45, indicating strong awareness of body safety and privacy principles. Teachers also exhibited positive attitudes toward implementing sex education, with 65% categorized as high and 30% as moderate. However, the study reveals significant challenges in the readiness of instructional media, with 53% of teachers in the moderate category and 23% in the low category due to limited access to appropriate storybooks, visual aids, and educational videos. The study concludes that although teachers possess strong conceptual knowledge and supportive attitudes, the lack of adequate learning materials hinders optimal implementation. Strengthening institutional support and providing developmentally appropriate media are essential to improving sex education practices in ECE settings.*

**Keywords:** *Early Childhood Education, Instructional Media, Knowledge, Sex Education*

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## INTRODUCTION

Cases of sexual violence in early childhood have increased significantly in various countries, including Indonesia, thus strengthening the urgency of sex education as a preventive effort that must start from the preschool age. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) emphasizes that early childhood sex education is an important intervention to equip children with an understanding of the body, self-limitations, personal safety, and the ability to seek help when facing dangerous situations. Various global studies show that children who receive developmentally appropriate sex education have better body awareness, can recognize inappropriate behavior, and are more empowered to protect themselves. (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021); (Robinson et al., 2019).

However, in many Asian countries, including Indonesia, sex education is still seen as a sensitive and taboo issue. Cultural norms and moral values often limit teachers and parents from discussing topics related to the body and sexuality with children. (Leung et al., 2019). As a result, many children grow up without a basic understanding of self-boundaries and body safety, making them more vulnerable to various forms of sexual violence and exploitation. National data show an increasing trend of sexual violence in preschoolers, indicating that reactive or prohibition-based approaches to education are no longer adequate to protect children effectively.

Globally, UNESCO (2018) recommends sex education from an early age as a holistic learning process that involves cognitive, emotional, social, and ethical dimensions. In the context of early childhood education (PAUD), teachers play a strategic role as the primary agents who introduce the concepts of body safety and self-respect. However, several studies show that many PAUD teachers do not feel professionally prepared, both in conceptual knowledge and pedagogical skills, to teach sex education appropriately. (Citak Tunc et al., 2018). Limited

training, lack of teaching materials, and lack of institutional support are frequently reported obstacles.

Similar conditions are also found in Indonesia. Some local studies show that although early childhood teachers are aware of the importance of sex education, its implementation is still limited and not systematic. Teachers tend to introduce only body parts and simple rules on personal safety, without clearly mapping development indicators. (Lestari, 2024). Understanding of sex education for teachers and parents falls in the medium category, but the implementation aspect, especially regarding learning methods and media readiness, remains the main challenge.

Recent research confirms that the risk to children extends beyond the physical environment into the digital space. Children are increasingly exposed to digital devices from a very young age, making them vulnerable to exposure to inappropriate content, cyber grooming, and online exploitation. (Smahel et al., 2020). This situation requires PAUD teachers to understand not only aspects of the body concept, but also digital literacy and online safety as an integral part of modern-era sex education.

Although many studies have discussed sex education in early childhood, there are still few that comprehensively assess teachers' understanding of early childhood education, including conceptual knowledge, attitudes, and readiness for media and learning materials. Most studies focus on teacher perceptions or on a single aspect of sex education. Therefore, there is an urgent need to conduct empirical analysis based on a quantitative approach to produce a more objective picture of the understanding of PAUD teachers in the Indonesian context.

This study aims to fill this gap by measuring the level of PAUD teachers' understanding of sex education through three leading indicators, namely: (1) basic knowledge, (2) attitude towards sex education, and (3) readiness of media and learning materials. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of education policies, teacher training, and the preparation of an early childhood education curriculum that is more responsive to the needs of child protection in the digital era.

Recent empirical studies at the international level further support these findings. For example, teachers' perceptions in Malaysia found that although educators acknowledged the importance of sexuality education, their implementation was limited due to cultural taboos, low confidence, and restricted curricula. (Wan Nawati et al., 2021). Cherrington (2021) examined early childhood teachers' preparedness in Australia, concluding that limited training and lack of teaching resources were significant barriers to effective implementation. Wurtele (1987) showed that structured body-safety curricula significantly improve children's ability to recognize and resist inappropriate touch, reinforcing the role of teachers as primary agents of prevention. Wankhede (2020) emphasized that sex education in early childhood must include digital safety, given children's increasing exposure to online environments that pose risks such as grooming and inappropriate content.

Several studies have consistently shown that although early childhood teachers acknowledge the importance of sexuality education, its implementation remains limited due to multiple constraints. For instance, Wan Nawati et al. (2021) found that preschool teachers in Malaysia faced cultural taboos, low confidence, and restricted curriculum support. Similarly, Cherrington et al. (2021) reported that insufficient professional training and lack of appropriate teaching resources hinder teachers' readiness to deliver sex education effectively. In addition, Wurtele (1987) demonstrated that structured body-safety programs can significantly improve children's protective skills, but their effectiveness depends heavily on teacher preparedness. More recent studies also highlight the growing importance of integrating digital safety into early childhood sex education, as children are increasingly exposed to online risks such as cyber grooming and inappropriate content (Smahel et al., 2020; Stoilova et al., 2019). Taken together, these studies indicate that the effectiveness of early childhood sex education is not only

determined by teachers' knowledge, but also by their pedagogical readiness, institutional support, and access to appropriate learning resources.

The growing influence of digital media introduces new complexities. Young children now encounter digital environments long before they enter school, according to research by Stoilova et al. (2019) shows that unmonitored digital exposure can increase children's vulnerability to online sexual exploitation. This heightens the need for early childhood educators to integrate digital safety and emotional literacy into sex education, a pedagogical area where many teachers feel insufficiently trained.

Despite a considerable body of literature, a significant research gap remains: few studies have quantitatively assessed a comprehensive understanding of PAUD teachers, including conceptual knowledge, attitudes, and instructional readiness, using validated instruments. Most existing research either focuses on qualitative perceptions or only examines a single dimension of teacher competence. Therefore, the current study seeks to fill this gap by reviewing early childhood teachers' understanding of sex education across three sub-variables: conceptual knowledge, attitudes, and readiness of media/materials. This empirical analysis provides crucial insights for strengthening teacher training, curriculum development, and child-protection policies in Indonesia.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a quantitative, survey-based approach (Adrias & Ruswandi, 2025). This approach was chosen to describe the level of understanding of early childhood education teachers regarding sex education, based on indicators of basic knowledge, attitudes, and readiness regarding media and learning materials. The survey method is suitable when the research aims to quantitatively examine phenomena in a specific population without manipulating variables. (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

The research population comprises all PAUD teachers in the Antapani area of Bandung City. The sample totaled 57 teachers, selected using the saturated sample technique (*total sampling*) because all members of the population were made respondents. This technique was chosen in view of the relatively small population and accessibility that allows researchers to reach all teachers. (Patton, 2014).

The data collection instrument is in the form of a digital questionnaire through *Google Form*, which is compiled based on three leading indicators: (1) conceptual understanding; (2) attitudes towards sex education, and (3) readiness of media and learning materials. Each indicator is elaborated into several statement items using the Likert Scale with five response options (Joshi et al., 2015). The instrument has been tested for validity, yielding 22 valid items and 1 invalid item. Reliability was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and resulted in a value of 0.932, which indicates a very high level of reliability because it exceeds the minimum limit of 0.70 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

The data analysis technique uses descriptive statistics to describe the teacher's level of understanding, including minimum, maximum, mean, assessment categories, and the frequency distribution for each indicator. (Field, 2024; Muijs, 2004). Classification of teacher comprehension scores using the following categories:

Table 1. Classification of Teachers' Understanding of Sex Education

Score	Category
13–23	Low
24–34	Medium
35–45	Height

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study measures PAUD teachers' understanding of sex education through three leading indicators: basic knowledge, attitudes, and readiness of media and learning materials. Overall, PAUD teachers' knowledge of sex education is in the medium category. Although teachers have a strong cognitive base and positive attitudes, the real challenge is found in the availability of learning support instruments in schools.

### *Basic Knowledge of Sex Education*

Based on research data, the majority of PAUD teachers have an excellent level of basic knowledge about the concept of sex education. Most of the respondents, namely 96%, were in the high category, while the rest were divided equally by 2% in the medium category and 2% in the low category. This achievement is supported by a mean score of 42.28 out of a maximum of 45, indicating that, conceptually, teachers have understood the importance of body recognition and privacy in early childhood.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Basic Knowledge

Statistic	Score
Mean	42.28
Median	44.00
Mode	45
Std. Deviation	4.956
Minimum	13
Maximum	45

### **Attitudes towards the Application of Sex Education**

The second indicator shows that PAUD teachers tend to have a positive attitude towards the implementation of sex education in the school environment. As many as 65% of teachers are in the high category and 30% in the medium category, reflecting a collective awareness of their strategic role in preventing sexual violence through education. Only 5% of respondents still show doubts or are in the low category. The average attitude score of 33.33 shows the consistency of teachers' support for this program.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Teacher Attitudes

Statistic	Score
Mean	33.33
Median	34.00
Mode	35
Std. Deviation	4.098
Minimum	18
Maximum	40

The results of the study showed that PAUD teachers have a positive attitude towards the implementation of sex education in the school environment. As many as 65% of teachers are in the high category and 30% in the medium category, so more than 90% of respondents strongly accept sex education as an essential part of early childhood learning. The average score of 33.33, with a median of 34 and a mode of 35, indicates that most teachers are not only generally supportive but also have a consistent view of the urgency of this education. The *standard deviation* of 4.098 indicates moderate variation in attitudes, yet remains within a range that reinforces the conclusion that positive attitudes constitute a collective tendency.

### **Media Readiness and Learning Materials**

In contrast to knowledge and attitudes, the readiness of media and learning materials is the main challenge for educators. Data shows that the majority of teachers (53%) are still in the

medium category in terms of readiness of sex learning infrastructure. Meanwhile, 24% of respondents had a readiness level of "high". Still, almost the same number, was 23% of teachers, were in the "low" category, indicating limited access to relevant storybooks, educational videos, or teaching aids. This causes the implementation of sex education in the classroom not to run optimally and comprehensively.

Table 4. Distribution of Teaching and Media Readiness

Statistic	Score
Mean	22.93
Median	23.00
Mode	24
Std. Deviation	4.187
Minimum	14
Maximum	30

The results of the study show that the readiness of media and learning materials is the most challenging aspect in the implementation of sex education in PAUD. Most teachers (53%) are in the medium category, while 24% are in the high category and 23% are in the low category. The average score of 22.93 with a median of 23 shows that, in general, learning support media is still limited and not evenly available in each educational unit. The *standard deviation* of 4.187 indicates an imbalance in readiness between teachers and institutions.

### Discussion

The findings indicate that early childhood education (ECE) teachers possess a strong level of basic knowledge of sex education. This is reflected in the dominance of respondents in the high category, supported by a high average score, which suggests that teachers generally have a well-established conceptual understanding of fundamental aspects such as body awareness and privacy in early childhood. These results highlight that, at the cognitive level, teachers are adequately equipped with essential knowledge required to introduce sex education concepts to young learners.

The results of the study showed that PAUD teachers' understanding of sex education was in the medium category. These findings indicate that although teachers have an adequate cognitive foundation in the basic concepts of sex education, the implementation of learning is not entirely optimal, as a gap persists between conceptual knowledge and adequate instructional support in early childhood education units. This condition is in line with international research that shows that teachers' competence in early childhood sex education is not only determined by conceptual knowledge, but also by pedagogical readiness, policy support, and availability of learning facilities. (Citak Tunc et al., 2018; Wan Nawi et al., 2021).

The data shows that 96% of teachers are in the high category on the basic knowledge indicator, with an average score of 42.28 out of a maximum score of 45. The high median (44) and mode (45) indicated consistent understanding among respondents, while the standard deviation of 4.956 indicated relatively stable variation. These findings confirm that most teachers have understood key concepts, such as body part recognition, privacy restrictions, and personal safety principles, which need to be introduced early.

This high achievement of knowledge is consistent with UNESCO's (2018) recommendation which emphasizes that sex education at an early age must focus on aspects of *body awareness*, self-protection, and the ability to recognize inappropriate behavior. In addition, Goldfarb and Lieberman (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021) affirm that comprehensive and developmentally appropriate sex education has been proven to improve children's body literacy

as well as their ability to identify risky situations. Teachers' strong understanding of this aspect is an essential capital for practical implementation in the field.

However, high knowledge does not automatically guarantee quality learning practices. Various international studies have noted that teachers often experience *pedagogical hesitation*, which is hesitation in teaching sensitive topics due to cultural pressure, professional anxiety, and lack of training. (Cherrington et al., 2021; Leung et al., 2019). Therefore, the high knowledge score in this study needs to be followed up with increasing pedagogical capacity so that the implementation of sex education does not stop at the teacher's cognitive level.

Teachers' basic knowledge has essential implications for the implementation of safe, precise, and developmentally appropriate sex education. With a strong conceptual foundation, teachers have the potential to become strategic actors in the prevention of child sexual violence through prevention-based educational approaches. (Wurtele, 1987). However, without the support of learning media, teaching guidelines, and ongoing training, this knowledge is at risk of not being implemented optimally.

Research by Smahel et al. (Smahel et al., 2020) and Stoilova et al. (Stoilova et al., 2019) emphasized that the digital context presents a new form of risk for children, so teachers need to balance the concept of body recognition with basic digital literacy. In other words, today's sex education requires teachers to have two competencies: *body safety literacy* and *digital safety awareness*. Strong conceptual knowledge in this research needs to be developed in both domains.

Although teachers have high knowledge, the study's overall results indicate that their general understanding remains in the moderate range. This suggests a *gap* between what teachers know and what they can do in the context of learning. These obstacles may stem from the lack of supporting media, the lack of a clear operational curriculum, and social sensitivity to the issue of sex education in children, factors that have been widely found in Southeast Asian literature. (Wan Nawi et al., 2021).

Thus, the high score on basic knowledge in this study should be seen as an initial foundation, not an indicator that the implementation has run optimally. Systemic interventions in the form of school policies, module development, teacher training, and improving parental literacy are needed so that sex education can be integrated comprehensively and sustainably.

Overall, the findings of this study are in line with research at the international level that emphasizes the importance of teacher understanding as a fundamental component in early childhood sex education. However, international research also confirms that *aspects of teacher readiness, institutional support, and resource availability play a greater role in determining implementation success than theoretical knowledge alone*. (Cherrington et al., 2021; Robinson et al., 2019). Therefore, the results of this study support the argument that improving teacher competence must be carried out holistically through strengthening capacity, policies, and learning ecosystems.

This finding is essential, as teachers' attitudes are among the strongest predictors in determining the success of curriculum implementation, especially on sensitive topics such as sex education. The Cherrington study (2021) confirms that teachers' positive attitudes towards sensitive issues are closely related to their readiness to design safe and developmentally appropriate learning strategies. Teachers with a positive attitude are more likely to foster an open, responsive, and stigma-free communication environment when introducing concepts of the body, privacy, and personal safety rules to children.

This positive attitude also reflects the increasing awareness of PAUD teachers regarding their strategic role in preventing sexual violence against children. The global literature shows that teachers are in a critical position in providing prevention education because they have direct

and intensive access to children. (Wurtele, 1987). When teachers have an open attitude and support sex education, they tend to be more proactive in identifying signs of risky behavior and conducting pedagogical interventions based on *body safety* and emotional literacy.

In addition, the proportion of teachers who show a positive attitude can be understood in the context of increasing exposure to the issue of sexual violence against children in the national and international media in recent years. Robinson et al. (Robinson et al., 2019) show that teachers' perceptions of the urgency of sex education are greatly influenced by increasing public awareness of the risks of sexual exploitation and the need to equip children with self-protection skills. Thus, this study's results show PAUD teachers' adaptive response to evolving social dynamics.

However, the finding that 5% of teachers still show hesitation or low confidence is worth noting. These doubts can arise from cultural factors, taboo perceptions, social pressures, or a lack of professional training. A study by Leung et al. (Leung et al., 2019) in various Asian countries found that teachers' ambivalent attitudes towards sex education are generally influenced by society's moral values, concerns about parents' reactions, and uncertainty about the limits of the material that can be taught. Therefore, strengthening teachers' pedagogical literacy in sex education is essential to reduce this doubt and ensure alignment in implementation in the field.

Overall, the results of this study show that teachers' attitudes are a substantial social capital for the implementation of sex education in early childhood education. This positive attitude must be supported by pedagogical training, curriculum guidelines, and school policies that allow teachers to teach sex education systematically and safely.

These findings indicate a significant *resource gap*, even though teachers have positive knowledge and attitudes towards sex education. This condition is in line with international findings, for example, the research of Wan Nawi et al. (Wan Nawi et al., 2021) in Malaysia, which shows that the limitations of teaching materials, the absence of standard modules, and the lack of institutional support are the main obstacles in implementing sex education in early childhood. Teachers generally understand the principles of body safety, but have difficulty in finding media that is developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant.

Limited access to learning media such as educational storybooks, learning videos about body privacy, or simple anatomical props has direct implications for the quality of the implementation of sex education in the classroom. According to Cherrington (Cherrington et al., 2021) The availability of appropriate learning media not only helps teachers convey sensitive material safely and comfortably but also supports the development of children's mental representations of body concepts, boundaries, and self-esteem. Without adequate media support, teachers tend to rely solely on verbal methods, which are less effective for early childhood learning through visualisation and sensorimotor experiences.

In addition, the presence of relevant media plays an essential role in fostering a non-stigmatizing learning environment. Leung et al. (Leung et al., 2019) found that culturally context-adjusted teaching materials help reduce sensitivity and resistance to sex education, both from teachers and parents. In the Indonesian context, the limitations of the media make it difficult for teachers to explain basic concepts such as "private area", "safe touch", or "who can help when children shower or get dressed" in a way that is developmentally appropriate and does not cause anxiety.

Media unpreparedness is also closely related to the lack of formal training on sex education. Teachers who have never received training tend not to know the appropriate media, how to use it, or the competency standards that children must meet. This is also noted by Robinson et al. (Robinson et al., 2019), who state that teachers often need visual guides and practice modules to teach sex education systematically and in accordance with the curriculum's objectives.

The findings of this study are also related to the increasing digital risks faced by children the surveys by Smahel et al. (Smahel et al., 2020) and Stoilova et al. (Stoilova et al., 2019) Confirm that today's children are exposed to digital media from a very young age, so learning

materials must include basic digital literacy. Without educational digital media, such as interactive videos or animations on online safety, teachers struggle to provide a comprehensive understanding of new risks, including cyber grooming, oversharing, and online contact with strangers.

Thus, the readiness of media and learning materials is a priority for policy intervention. It is necessary to provide standard teaching materials that are in accordance with developments, teacher training in selecting and using learning media, and support from PAUD institutions in providing safe and educational teaching aids. Without it, the implementation of sex education will run partially and will not reach its maximum potential, even though teachers already have the knowledge and attitude to support it.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that PAUD teachers' understanding of sex education is in the medium category, which indicates an imbalance between conceptual capacity, pedagogical readiness, and available instructional support. In the basic knowledge indicator, teachers achieved very high levels, with 96% of respondents in the high category and an average score of 42.28. These findings confirm that teachers in general have understood the fundamental concepts of sex education, including body recognition, privacy boundaries, and the principle of personal safety.

However, teachers' high knowledge is not always directly proportional to the quality of implementation in the field. In the attitude indicator, the majority of teachers (65% in the high category and 30% in the medium category) strongly supported implementing sex education in early childhood education. This positive attitude reflects teachers' awareness that sex education is an integral part of efforts to prevent sexual violence against children.

In contrast to the previous two indicators, media readiness and learning materials are the biggest challenges. 53% of teachers are in the medium category, 24% in the high category, and 23% in the low category. The limitations of educational media, teaching materials, and teaching aids lead to significant instructional unpreparedness, so that the implementation of sex education has not been optimal or comprehensive.

Overall, the study confirms that although early childhood education teachers have a strong conceptual foundation and attitude towards sex education, the success of implementation is strongly influenced by the availability of media, institutional support, and professional training. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed in develop teaching media in line with developments, increase pedagogical capacity, and align institutional policies with sex education so that it can be effectively integrated in early childhood learning.

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