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# Inclusivity of Sexuality Education and Gender Equality from a Humanistic Philosophical Perspective: A Case Study in an Urban Primary School

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#### Abstract.

Sexuality education and gender equality at the primary school level still face various structural, cultural, and pedagogical challenges, particularly within the context of urban Indonesian society. This article aims to analyze the implementation of sexuality education and gender equality in primary education practice through a humanistic philosophical approach. This study employed a qualitative-philosophical method using a case study involving six teachers in primary schools in Surabaya. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis. The findings indicate that sexuality education has been present in a hidden and euphemistic form, such as girls' counseling sessions or extracurricular activities, but has not yet been delivered explicitly, inclusively, or in a gender-equitable manner. There is evident gender role bias in teaching practices, which highlights teachers' weak reflective awareness of equality values. The humanistic approach offers an ethical and pedagogical framework capable of reconstructing educational practices by positioning children as autonomous individuals who have the right to knowledge, protection, and respect for diversity. This article proposes the need for a transformation towards sexuality education grounded in humanistic values to foster a more empathetic, just, and contextually relevant education system.

**Keywords:** Sexuality education; gender equality; humanistic philosophy and inclusive approach.

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Modern education faces numerous challenges arising from rapid social change and technological advancement, particularly concerning societal values, including concepts of gender and sexuality. Children who are exposed to sexual information from various media sources at an early age often lack adequate guidance to navigate these complex topics within the context of their evolving moral and ethical frameworks.

One significant challenge in modern education is the pressure on institutions to adapt and modernize in response to social change, including shifting attitudes towards sexuality and gender identity. The constant competition compels educational institutions to continually modernize to remain attractive, which indirectly influences how they address sensitive subjects such as gender and sexuality (1). Modernization encompasses not only technological advancement but also the integration of contemporary societal values into the curriculum, particularly in the context of globalization, which affects educational practices and societal norms, including those related to sexuality and gender(2).

At the same time, the influence of media on children's understanding of these concepts poses substantial challenges. Today's children are exposed to information at an unprecedented speed, which can lead to confusion without appropriate guidance from parents or educational institutions. Rahmi et al. argue that although technological progress offers numerous benefits, it also introduces new moral dilemmas for parents striving to educate their children. Parents increasingly struggle to impart moral lessons amid a landscape in which digital narratives often conflict with traditional values (3).

Another crucial aspect is the integration of character education within the modern educational framework. There is a critical need for education systems to develop students' character alongside

academic skills, ensuring that learners cultivate a comprehensive understanding of ethical values, including those related to gender and sexuality (4). This approach aligns with findings by other scholars who emphasize the importance of holistic education that responds to the socio-cultural contexts in which children are raised.

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Furthermore, the role of technology cannot be overlooked. As modern educational practices evolve, the use of technology in teaching introduces innovative methods but also presents challenges in ensuring that these tools are used effectively. Li and Xue assert that reforming educational practices in response to technological advancements is essential, as this has implications for how subjects such as gender and sexuality are presented and discussed in the classroom (5). Digital learning environments can exacerbate issues of misinformation or lack of context regarding sensitive topics, making teacher preparedness increasingly vital.

The lack of comprehensive sexuality education at the primary school level in Indonesia remains an urgent issue, marked by deeply rooted cultural taboos and limited educational policy frameworks. In Indonesia, sexuality education is often considered a taboo subject, particularly at the primary school level. This perception makes many educators and policymakers reluctant to address the topic within the curriculum. Cultural conservatism, especially among Muslim communities, contributes to the widespread belief that discussing sexual health is inappropriate for young children, creating an environment in which this topic is systematically avoided in educational settings (6). This societal apprehension is reinforced by schools' fear that introducing sexuality education could lead to misconceptions about its purpose, such as the mistaken belief that it equates to teaching children about sexual intercourse (7).

Moreover, the current national curriculum for primary education does not explicitly include comprehensive and holistic sexuality education. Although frameworks like the *Merdeka Belajar* initiative prioritize flexibility and inclusivity in education, they often fall short of adequately addressing sensitive topics such as sexual health (8). Gandasari et al. highlight that educational policies do not sufficiently reflect the need for a sexuality education curriculum, perpetuating a cycle of silence around sexual health issues in schools (9). Additionally, a review of inclusive education policies reveals ongoing barriers to implementing frameworks that cover all essential subjects, including sexuality education.

The absence of effective sexuality education has significant implications for students. A lack of knowledge in this area can lead to higher rates of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections among adolescents, particularly in Indonesia, where societal conservatism clashes with growing sexual health concerns (10). Research shows that better-informed students are more likely to make healthier decisions regarding their sexual health, underscoring the importance of integrating comprehensive sexuality education into the curriculum(11).

The need for a humanistic approach in sexuality education is crucial for fostering a healthy understanding of sexuality and relationships from an early age. This educational philosophy emphasizes creating a liberating and inclusive environment that respects diversity and focuses on humanity. In line with contemporary shifts towards more inclusive sexuality education, integrating a humanistic perspective can facilitate a more comprehensive and empathetic understanding of sexual health among adolescents.

Humanistic education seeks to address the fundamental aspects of the human experience, thereby creating learning environments that nurture respect for diversity and individuality. This involves recognizing the dignity and personal value of each learner and creating spaces where students feel safe and empowered to express themselves. When effectively implemented, a humanistic approach can enhance educational outcomes by fostering supportive environments and designing contextual tasks that honor and embrace diverse identities and experiences (12). This aligns with findings that emphasize the importance of educational initiatives prioritizing diverse sexuality

education, which is significantly correlated with increased knowledge of sexual health and better humanistic care in health settings (13).

Furthermore, exploring humanistic values within education can lead to the development of empathic competencies essential for understanding complex social issues, including those related to sexual health. Boot-Haury discusses the implications of humanistic psychology within educational frameworks, highlighting core principles for facilitating supportive and compassionate learning environments (14). Such educational settings are highly relevant to the goals of sexuality education, where understanding and respecting students' experiences and perspectives are critical for effective learning. Humanistic competencies—such as empathy and compassion are key components of holistic patient care and align with educational strategies focused on sexual health. By strengthening these aspects within sexuality education, educators can contribute to the overall emotional and psychological well-being of students (15).

Based on these issues, it is evident that there remains a significant gap in research examining sexuality education at the primary school level from a philosophical perspective, particularly a humanistic one. This gap presents an opportunity to enrich the ethical and value dimensions within the discourse on sexuality education. Consequently, there is still a lack of concrete conceptual or pedagogical models on how humanistic and gender-inclusive sexuality education can be operationalized in primary schools. Therefore, this study aims to explore how the inclusivity of sexuality education and gender equality can be implemented in primary schools through a humanistic philosophical approach. Additionally, it seeks to analyze gender values that emerge within the primary education environment and how humanism can serve as an ethical and pedagogical framework.

#### II. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative-philosophical approach using a case study method. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews and a comprehensive literature review. The interviews served as a strategy to enrich the understanding of the phenomena under investigation. While the study is firmly grounded in deep philosophical reflection through the literature review, it is complemented by empirical data from the field to ensure that this reflection remains connected to the practical realities of education. This combination aims to bridge the gap between conceptual frameworks and actual practices, capturing the concrete dynamics of education within its specific context. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow flexibility in exploring the thoughts, values, and experiences of the informants, who comprised teachers and a vice principal at primary schools in the urban area of Surabaya.

The informants for this study consisted of six primary school teachers from various schools across urban Surabaya. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- 1. Active teachers teaching at the primary school level (either lower or upper grades).
- 2. A minimum of five years of teaching experience.
- 3. Experience in delivering lessons or engaging in discussions with students on topics related to the body, personal hygiene, social relationships, or values of equality within the context of character education.
- 4. Willingness to participate in in-depth and open interviews regarding their teaching practices related to sensitive issues and values.

The selection of teachers as the primary informants is based on their role as key actors who interact directly with children in daily classroom contexts. Teachers do not merely transmit knowledge; they also shape students' values, norms, and perspectives on social and moral issues. Therefore, teachers' reflections on their experiences, challenges, and ethical considerations are vital for understanding how issues of sexuality education and gender equality are articulated in practice.

Semi-structured interviews provided an open space for informants to express their views, experiences, and personal considerations. Each interview lasted approximately 30–60 minutes and was conducted face-to-face, following ethical protocols that included obtaining informed consent and ensuring the confidentiality of informants' identities. The following table provides an overview of the informants involved in this study.

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Table 1. Informant Profile

No	Initials	Gender Age	Position/Role	Years of Teaching
1	G1	Female 35	Lower Grade Teacher, Public School	8 years
2	G2	Male 42	Upper Grade Teacher, Private School	7 years
3	G3	Female 39	Science (IPAS) Teacher, Public School	6 years
4	G4	Female 31	Upper Grade Teacher, Islamic School	8 years
5	G5	Male 45	Vice Principal, Public School	12 years
6	G6	Female 33	Religious Education Teacher, Public School	6 years

The six informants came from diverse school backgrounds, including public and private institutions, as well as religious and general schools. This diversity was intended to ensure that the findings represent a wide spectrum of experiences and approaches among teachers in addressing issues of sexuality education and gender in the context of primary education in an urban setting.

Data obtained from these informants were analyzed through thematic coding, followed by interpretative and reflective analysis using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework, integrated with a humanistic philosophical approach. This analysis aimed to reveal not only the practices but also the underlying values, moral considerations, and reflective awareness that inform teachers' actions within the complex context of primary education.

#### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research originates from a deep concern over the limited integration of sexuality education and gender equality values in primary education practice, especially within urban areas characterized by complex socio-cultural dynamics. Sexuality education, which should guarantee children's right to information and protection, is often substituted with moralistic narratives and cultural biases, resulting in the marginalization of the body and relational dimensions from the learning space.

By employing Fairclough's critical discourse analysis as its methodological foundation, this study not only reveals what is conveyed in educational practice but also examines how discourse is constructed, reproduced, and negotiated through language, actions, and the surrounding social structures. In line with the framework of humanistic educational philosophy, these findings and discussions aim to analyze the extent to which educational practice in primary schools does or does not represent a commitment to children's rights, gender equality, and profound humanistic values (16). Accordingly, the findings should not merely be viewed as factual data but as a critical reflection on the current state of education: caught between resistance from traditional values, policy gaps, and hopes for a more ethical, inclusive, and emancipatory education.

### Representation of Sexuality Education: Discourse Closure and Cultural Resistance

Field data show that sexuality education in urban primary schools is yet to be explicitly integrated into the curriculum structure or classroom practices. Teachers mostly address topics related to the body, health, and social relationships using euphemistic and normative frameworks, for

instance through lessons on personal hygiene or puberty within science classes. As expressed by one informant, a primary school teacher, behind the absence of a specific subject or the term "sexuality education" in the official curriculum, there are indeed implicit and hidden forms of sexuality education, particularly through extracurricular activities and student counseling sessions. Most informants noted that information related to the body and biological changes is often discussed during *keputrian*—an informal session typically attended only by fifth- or sixth-grade girls.

Informant G1 revealed that her school holds monthly *keputrian* sessions, usually involving female teachers and school counselors, focusing on menstrual education and reproductive hygiene. "We don't call it sexuality education, but it does cover how girls should care for their bodies during menstruation, how to use sanitary pads, and explaining that these changes are normal," she stated. Similarly, G4, a teacher at a private Islamic primary school, noted that such sessions are part of efforts to instill modesty and maintain aurat (parts of the body that should be covered). "We use a religious approach. The children are told that bodily changes are a sign of maturity and that, as girls, they must guard their behavior and appearance. This is communicated in special keputrian discussions, usually once a month."

Meanwhile, G3 acknowledged that topics about the body and reproductive organs are indeed included in the science and physical education syllabi but are delivered very cautiously. "I mostly use medical terms and ensure the delivery remains neutral. The children usually giggle or feel embarrassed, so we manage the approach," she explained.

G2 and G5, an upper-grade teacher and a vice principal at a public school, stated that their schools rely on school counselors or homeroom teachers to convey information about puberty, including the differences in bodily changes between boys and girls. "Usually, boys are taught about wet dreams, deeper voices, and body hair growth. But it's not included in a formal lesson; it's covered through counseling," G2 explained. G5 added that there are limitations since not all teachers have the skills or comfort level to address such sensitive topics, which often results in superficial discussions without deeper, reflective dialogue. Informant G6, a religious education teacher at a public school, shared that she often integrates lessons about the body and relational boundaries into fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), especially concerning cleanliness (thaharah) and appropriate social interactions.

From these interviews, it can be concluded that while sexuality education is present in primary education practice, it is fragmented, normative, and inconsistent. The dominance of *keputrian*-based approaches shows gender bias, as girls receive more systematic and earlier education than boys. Meanwhile, relying on counselors or homeroom teachers does not guarantee an open, reflective, and child-rights-based space for discussion. These findings highlight the need for a humanistic ethical framework to reconstruct how schools understand and deliver sexuality education in a more inclusive, gender-sensitive, and holistic manner.

These findings align with studies Hasiana on 2020 (17), that show resistance to sexuality education at the primary level often stems from cultural norms and societal moral anxiety over early exposure to sexual information. In this context, the discourse of sexuality education is silenced not due to a lack of urgency but due to the dominance of deeply entrenched conservative values.

Fairclough's critical discourse analysis helps reveal how teachers' discursive practices are shaped by social structures and dominant ideologies, influencing how teachers select words, construct narratives, and make sense of children's sexuality. The avoidance of the term "sexuality" in teaching practices reflects the power relations between societal value structures and institutionalized educational

From a humanistic philosophical perspective, this condition shows that there is not yet a full recognition of children's rights to understand their bodies and identities holistically. As Rogers asserts, education that values humanity positions children as autonomous individuals with the right to

knowledge and understanding of themselves, including the biological and relational aspects of sexuality (18).

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# Gender Dimension, Practice Bias, and Systemic Unawareness

The field findings reveal that gender bias still exists implicitly within school practices. Tasks such as classroom cleaning duties, group work assignments, and behavioral expectations continue to be grounded in stereotypical gender roles. For example, boys are assigned tasks like moving chairs or cleaning the schoolyard, while girls are assigned to clean the blackboard or tidy up the classroom. Informant G3 remarked, "We divide tasks so it's balanced. Boys usually handle the heavier work, girls handle the tidier parts."

Such practices reinforce binary and hierarchical assumptions about gender roles from an early age. This aligns with findings Hendarwati on 2023 (19), that formal education often acts as an agent reproducing gender inequality through symbolic practices that seem trivial yet shape identity structures. In critical discourse terms, this is known as a "gendered habitus" (20), ingrained ways of thinking and acting that become normalized in everyday life and are rarely questioned reflectively.

Teachers' lack of awareness of the structural dimensions of their practices indicates a weak commitment to reflective approaches in teaching. Education rooted in humanistic values requires ethical reflection on the values brought into the classroom. Therefore, there is a need for teacher training and professional development that not only focuses on content competence but also on critical awareness of power relations and biases embedded in teaching practices (21).

# A Humanistic Philosophical Perspective on Sexuality Education and Gender Equality

Humanistic philosophy offers an ethical and pedagogical framework relevant for addressing the challenges of sexuality education and gender equality at the primary school level, especially within social contexts still fraught with taboos, cultural biases, and resistance to sensitive topics. The essence of humanistic educational philosophy is the recognition of human dignity, personal uniqueness, and the holistic development of self-potential (22). In the context of sexuality education and gender equality, this approach emphasizes not only the transmission of factual knowledge about the body and reproduction but also the development of self-awareness, empathy, and the capacity for reflective thinking about values and fair social relations.

Carl Rogers emphasizes that true education is a process of facilitation, not control. Children cannot be viewed as passive vessels to be filled with norms or doctrines but as autonomous individuals who need guidance to understand their bodies and identities holistically. In sexuality education, this means creating space for children to ask questions, express feelings, and access accurate information about their bodies, relationships, and personal boundaries (23).

This approach contrasts with authoritarian and repressive educational models that often suppress children's curiosity in the name of morality or taboo. According to Paulo Freire, liberating education is education that raises consciousness, not one that instills fear. Humanistic-based sexuality education should teach that understanding sexuality is neither sinful nor threatening but part of self-awareness and responsibility as ethical and social beings (24).

Maslow's concept of self-actualization further highlights that education must encourage children to reach their fullest potential. In this context, learning about the body and sexuality becomes integral to achieving self-wholeness. Children must be taught that their bodies are part of their identity something to be respected, understood, and protected. This understanding forms the foundation for awareness of personal boundaries and bodily autonomy, which are essential for preventing sexual violence and fostering healthy relationships (25).

Humanistic philosophy also asserts that bodily awareness is not merely biological but existential—representing experiences, relationships, and one's position in society. Thus, sexuality education must go beyond anatomy and physiology to encompass psychological and social dimensions, including power relations, gender norms, and empathy among individuals (16).

Furthermore, humanistic philosophy underscores the importance of *care ethics* in education a principle vital to addressing gender issues in schools. Gender equality education is not only about equal treatment of boys and girls but also about developing sensitivity to inequality, dismantling stereotypes, and fostering fair, respectful social relations. Within a humanistic framework, gender equality is approached not through the logic of power or dogma but through relational experience and empathic communication between teachers and students. Teachers are not merely conveyors of information but moral guides who model fairness, openness, and non-discrimination in daily interactions. Gender-aware teachers are more reflective about role assignments in class, lesson narratives, and the strengthening of students' identities beyond binary male-female labels.

According to Perni on 2019 (26) a humanistic, compassion-focused educational approach that prioritizes respect and dignity significantly contributes to forming a holistic understanding of health and social relations, including sexuality and gender. In primary education, this approach can be embedded through contextual learning, reflective storytelling, and open discussions tailored to children's cognitive and emotional development.

One of the biggest barriers to sexuality education in primary schools is the dominance of moralistic paradigms that emphasize prohibitions and shame. Humanistic philosophy proposes a paradigm shift toward reflective ethics, where moral values and decisions arise from understanding and awareness rather than fear or dogma. Within this paradigm, sexuality education becomes a means of shaping personal and social responsibility based on rationality, empathy, and respect for diversity. This is crucial, given that children live in a pluralistic society and need to be equipped with adaptive, inclusive values that honor differences, including sexual orientation, gender expression, and diverse family values.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study affirms that sexuality education and gender equality in primary schools—particularly within Indonesia's urban areas—remain neither fully integrated nor explicitly embedded within the curriculum or classroom practice. Most teaching takes place in hidden and normative forms, such as *keputrian* sessions or within science and religious lessons, which offer minimal space for critical and reflective discussion. The dominance of moralistic approaches and gender bias in instructional structures demonstrates a limited understanding of sexuality as an integral part of children's identity and rights.

Humanistic philosophy offers an alternative approach that emphasizes the recognition of individual dignity, empathy, and ethical reflection throughout the learning process. Teachers, as key agents of transformation, must be empowered to understand and deliver sexuality education in a fair, inclusive, and contextually relevant manner. In this way, sexuality education will not merely serve as a realm for biological information but will become a vital space for value formation, healthy relationships, and early gender awareness. Therefore, policy interventions, teacher training, and curriculum development based on humanistic values are urgently needed to ensure an emancipatory education that upholds children's rights and remains relevant to contemporary socio-cultural dynamics.

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