

BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

DŘÍV, NEŽ BUDE POZDĚ

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Abstract

The article addresses the relevance and necessity of systematic sex education in primary education as a preventive measure against undesirable phenomena – from sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies to sexual violence and discrimination. Drawing on historical development, current societal needs, and international standards, it analyses the position of sex education in the Czech Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education 2025. The authors compare different approaches (conservative, progressive, and the middle pedagogical-psychological path), present research findings on teachers' attitudes, and highlight the role of educators, schools, and parents. The importance of teacher training, interdisciplinary cooperation, and continuous evaluation of teaching quality is emphasized.

Keywords: Sex education, prevention, Framework Educational Programme (FEP), pedagogical approaches

Abstrakt

Tento článek analyzuje význam a současné postavení sexuální výchovy v českém základním vzdělávání v kontextu historického vývoje, aktuálních společenských výzev a mezinárodních standardů. Na základě výzkumu názorů pedagogů a analýzy Rámcového vzdělávacího programu pro základní vzdělávání (RVP ZV 2025) je diskutována role škol, učitelů a rodičů při zajišťování kvalitní a efektivní sexuální výchovy. Zvláštní důraz je kladen na metodické a didaktické přístupy, odbornou přípravu pedagogů a spolupráci s externími odborníky. Studie potvrzuje potřebu systematické a věkově přiměřené sexuální výchovy, která by měla být integrální součástí výchovně-vzdělávacího procesu.

Klíčová slova: sexuální výchova, prevence, RVP, pedagogické přístupy

Introduction

Sexuality education is an essential component of comprehensive education worldwide, supporting young people in developing healthy attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for informed and responsible decision-making related to their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Czech educational context incorporates sexuality education within multiple curricular areas but faces challenges related to curriculum flexibility, teacher preparedness, and societal attitudes that influence consistent and effective implementation.

This study aims to investigate primary school teachers' attitudes toward the introduction and implementation of sexuality education at different stages of primary education and to identify factors influencing its quality within the Framework Educational Programme (RVP ZV 2025).

Theoretical Basis

The field of sexuality education is grounded in extensive international research highlighting its multidimensional nature and critical importance for young people's holistic development. Contemporary frameworks advocate for a comprehensive approach combining biological, psychological, social, and legal perspectives, reflecting the complex reality of human sexuality (Ketting, Friele, & Michielsen, 2015). This interdisciplinarity ensures that education goes beyond mere biological facts to encompass relational, ethical, and rights-based dimensions necessary for informed decision-making and well-being (Pound et al., 2017).

Empirical evidence underscores the effectiveness of age-appropriate, participatory pedagogies that engage learners actively, foster open communication, and create safe, inclusive environments for discussion (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021; UNESCO, 2018). Inclusive comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) also emphasizes the integration of gender equality and respect for diversity, which are vital for preventing sexual violence and promoting respectful relationships (WHO Regional Office for Europe & BZgA, 2010).

Moreover, international guidance from organizations such as UNESCO and WHO consistently stresses the importance of involving families and communities to support learners' development outside school environments. Teacher capacity building through systematic and ongoing professional development is a cornerstone of successful CSE implementation worldwide (UNESCO, 2018; Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021).

Recent global research also sheds light on challenges common across diverse settings, such as tensions between cultural sensitivities and educational imperatives, the variability of curricula implementation due to teachers' preparedness and resource availability, and the critical role of policy support to unify and sustain quality delivery (Le Mat, Kosar-Altinyelken, & Bos, 2022). Teacher preparation, supportive policy environments, and parental engagement

are consistently cited as core determinants of implementation quality (Hawkins & Smith, 2024). In the Czech context, persistent barriers include insufficient training, curriculum fragmentation, and cultural taboos (Chavula, Zulu, & Hurtig, 2022; Le Mat, Kosar-Altinyelken, & Bos, 2022). These insights not only inform best practices but also contextualize the Czech Republic's flexible Framework Educational Programme (RVP ZV 2025) within international trends and paradigms, underscoring the necessity for comprehensive support mechanisms to realize the full potential of sexuality education.

Research Description

The study utilized a mixed-methods design, conducting an anonymous online survey from January to March 2025 with 118 primary school teachers representing diverse Czech schools. The survey assessed teacher attitudes on timing for introducing sexuality education, support for external experts' involvement, content suitability, and communication with parents and communities. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a nuanced understanding of implementation challenges and perspectives.

Methodology

Quantitative survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics capturing frequencies and percentages of attitudes toward sexuality education initiation. Qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis independently coded by two researchers to enhance reliability and depth in interpreting teachers' views and concerns regarding sexuality education in schools.

Research Results

This section presents the key quantitative findings from the survey of primary school teachers regarding their attitudes to sexuality education introduction and implementation at different educational stages. The data illustrate varying levels of agreement and concern about the appropriate timing and delivery of sexuality education, reflecting the complexity of the topic within the school context.

Table 1: Attitudes Toward Introducing Sex Education in the First Level of Primary School

Response category	Count	%
Strongly agree	45	38.2
Agree	39	33.1
Slightly agree	16	13.4
Neutral	11	9.4
Slightly disagree	4	3.3
Disagree	1	0.8
Strongly disagree	2	1.8
Total	118	100.0

Table 1 summarizes teacher responses on whether sex education should be introduced early at the first level of primary school. Most teachers (84.7 %) responded positively (strongly agree, agree, slightly agree), indicating broad support. A smaller proportion expressed neutrality or disagreement, highlighting some hesitation.

Table 2: Opinion on Introducing Sex Education at the First Level of Primary School

Response category	Count	%
Strongly agree	23	19.6
Agree	15	12.7
Slightly agree	6	5.0
Neutral	32	27.1
Slightly disagree	8	6.7
Disagree	11	9.3
Strongly disagree	23	19.6
Total	118	100.0

Table 2 detects a more divided opinion on the appropriateness of introducing sex education at the first level. The presence of neutral responses and disagreement indicates varied attitudes, signalling the need for careful curriculum planning and stakeholder communication.

Table 3: Opinion on Introducing Sex Education During Puberty (Second Stage of Primary School)

Response category	Count	%
Strongly agree	78	66.1
Agree	18	15.3
Slightly agree	8	6.8
Neutral	6	5.1
Slightly disagree	1	0.8
Disagree	3	2.5
Strongly disagree	4	3.4
Total	118	100.0

Table 3 illustrates very strong support (about 87 %) for delivering sex education during puberty, consistent with developmental expectations and international practice, see also Fig. 1.

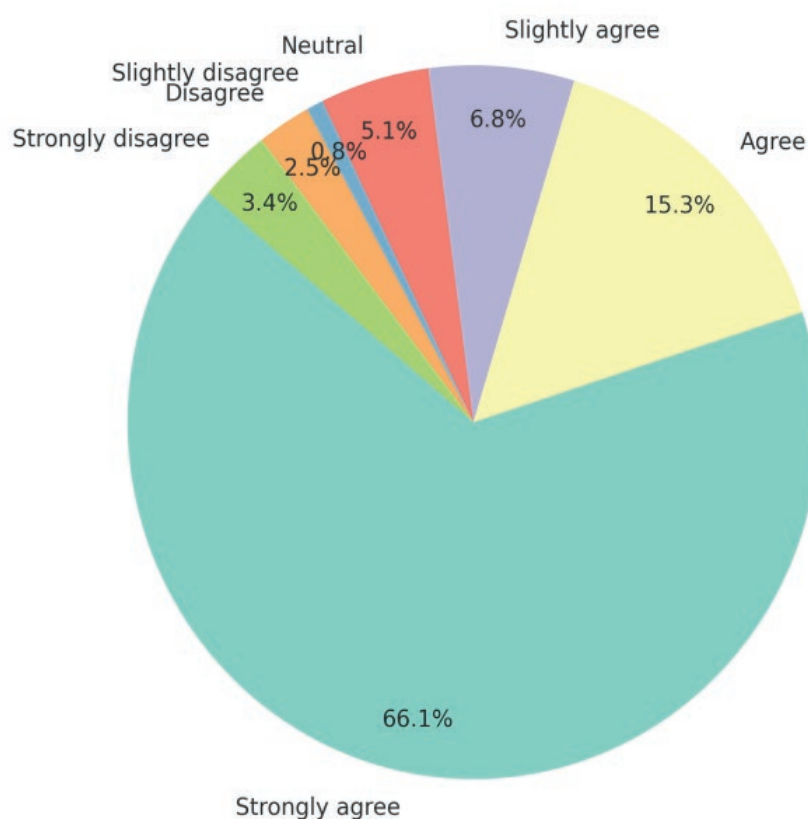


Figure 1 Distribution of responses regarding sex education during puberty

Overall Summary of the Research Findings

The research shows most teachers agree sex education should remain in schools and support involving external experts. It is most widely accepted during puberty (second stage). However, opinions differ on starting it in the first stage, requiring careful content planning and communication with parents. Implementation success depends on proper timing, clear goals, and professional teacher support.

Linking Research Findings to the Framework Educational Programme (RVP ZV 2025)

The findings reflect the multidimensional and flexible nature of the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education (RVP ZV 2025), which integrates sex education content across several educational areas, as summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Topics of Sex Education in the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education (RVP ZV 2025)

Educational area	Main topics
Man, and His World	Human body and health; personal hygiene; basic information on reproduction
Man, and Health	Sexual maturation; reproductive health; prevention of sexually transmitted diseases; consent
Man, and Society	Relationships; gender equality; prevention of sexual violence
Personal and Social Education	Self-respect; respect for others; communication in relationships; decision-making skills
Citizenship Education	Rights and responsibilities; legal aspects of sexual behaviour

Table 4 shows how sex education themes are spread across multiple fields, enabling an integrated approach. The lack of precise scheduling for grades requires teacher autonomy and methodological preparation.

The varied opinions on when to introduce sex education, particularly early initiation, underscore the need for clearer guidance and professional development. Curriculum flexibility should balance with standardized support and training to ensure comprehensive implementation (Ketting et al., 2015; Pound et al., 2017). Embedding sex education within citizenship education highlights its connection to rights and responsibilities (UNESCO, 2018).

Effective delivery depends heavily on teacher preparedness, with variability in competence potentially leading to uneven outcomes. Continued investment in teacher training and support materials is therefore critical.

Didactic Principles of Sex Education

Effective sex education requires key didactic principles: age-appropriate content matching pupils' development (Lottes & Kontula, 2000); interactive, active learning (Pound et al., 2017); multidisciplinary integration of biological, psychological, social, and legal aspects (Ketting et al., 2015); a safe, respectful environment for open discussion (UNESCO, 2018); promoting positive values and attitudes; and involving family and community (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). Successful implementation in Czech schools needs systematic teacher training, quality materials, and leadership support, with international evidence stressing regular instruction, skill-building, and collaboration with external experts (UNESCO, 2018; WHO Regional Office for Europe & BZgA, 2010).

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into Czech primary school teachers' attitudes toward sexuality education, several limitations should be noted. The data were collected via an anonymous online survey, which may introduce self-selection bias and limit representativeness of the whole teacher population. The relatively modest sample size (N=118) limits generalizability across all Czech schools, especially in rural or underrepresented regions.

Furthermore, the cross-sectional design captures attitudes at a single point in time and cannot assess changes over time or causal relationships. Qualitative responses, while enriching, were limited in depth due to the survey format and could benefit from follow-up interviews for deeper exploration. Finally, social desirability bias may have influenced teachers' responses on sensitive topics like sexuality education, potentially overestimating support levels.

Future research incorporating longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse samples, and mixed-method qualitative approaches would strengthen understanding and guide more tailored policy and practice interventions.

Discussion

The didactic principles outlined earlier—including age-appropriate content, interactive and multidisciplinary teaching, and involvement of families and communities—closely match areas identified by teachers as crucial for successful implementation (Pound et al., 2017; WHO Regional Office for Europe & BZgA, 2010). Surveyed educators emphasized the need for regular training, professional support, and open communication with parents, underscoring the relational aspect of sex education delivery. Teachers also recognized the value of external

experts but stressed that ownership and competence should remain primarily within the school framework.

Implications

The study's findings have significant implications for educational policy and practice in the Czech Republic. The clear support for sex education during puberty reinforces the need to prioritize comprehensive, developmentally appropriate curricula at the second stage of primary education. However, the divided opinions about early-stage sex education reveal potential barriers that require addressing through clearer curricular guidance, evidence-based resources, and professional development (Ketting et al., 2015; UNESCO, 2018). Moreover, the prominent demand for involving external experts and strengthening parent communication highlights the role of holistic community engagement to foster a supportive environment for sexuality education (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). The flexible nature of the RVP ZV 2025, while offering autonomy, necessitates robust teacher training and methodological support to reduce disparities in implementation quality and ensure equitable learning opportunities (Pound et al., 2017).

Recommendations for Practice

Building on the research insights, several practice-oriented recommendations emerge:

- **Enhancing Cooperation with Parents and the Community:** Transparent and ongoing dialogue with parents, alongside involving community experts, can build trust, address concerns, and integrate practical insights to enhance program acceptance and effectiveness (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021).
- **Strengthening Teachers' Professional Preparation:** Provide systematic training in subject knowledge, methods, and communication, inspired by programs from the Netherlands and Canada (Ketting et al., 2015).
- **Development of Unified Methodological Materials:** The Ministry should supply schools with evidence-based, age-appropriate guides to ensure consistent quality nationwide.
- **Integrating the Topic into Multiple Subjects:** Embed sex education across subjects like biology, civics, media literacy, and ethics to promote a healthy lifestyle.
- **Regular Evaluation and Innovation of the Programme:** Conduct ongoing assessments using pupil and parent feedback and expert evaluations to continuously improve the programme (UNESCO, 2018).

Conclusion

This study underscores the vital role of comprehensive sexuality education within Czech primary schools, affirming widespread teacher support for its continuation and development, particularly during puberty. The variability of opinions on early introduction points to the necessity of well-planned curricula, clear guidelines, and professional support to enhance teacher confidence and program consistency. Aligning RVP ZV 2025's flexible framework with international didactic principles and integrating community cooperation creates a foundation for effective, inclusive sex education. Ultimately, sustained commitment from policymakers, educators, parents, and experts is essential to equip young people with knowledge, skills, and values that promote their health, well-being, and rights.

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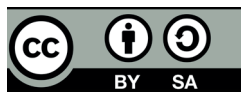
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