



Implementing Early Childhood Sexual Education to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse: A Case Study at RA Al-Khairaat SKEP Ternate, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse is a serious global issue that requires preventive efforts starting from early childhood. This study aims to examine the implementation of early childhood sexual education as a strategy for preventing child sexual abuse at RA Al-Khairaat SKEP, Ternate, Indonesia. A qualitative case study design was used to explore how sexual education is implemented in a natural educational setting. Participants included two teachers, two parents, and two children aged 5–6 years, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. The findings show that sexual education is implemented through three main aspects: self-identity recognition, gender understanding, and self-protection skills. Children were able to recognize their identities, inclusively understand gender concepts, and identify appropriate and inappropriate touch. The implementation was supported by thematic, play-based, and interactive learning approaches, as well as the integration of religious and moral values. Collaboration between teachers and parents also played an important role in reinforcing children's understanding and protective behaviors. This study concludes that early childhood sexual education can serve as an effective preventive strategy against child sexual abuse when delivered through developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant, and collaborative approaches. The findings help bridge the gap between theory and practice and provide practical guidance for educators, parents, and policymakers in designing context-sensitive sexual education programs.

Keywords:

Child sexual abuse prevention, early childhood, gender understanding, self-protection skills, sex education



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INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence against children is a critical global issue and a serious violation of human rights, with long-term consequences for children's psychological, social, and emotional development (Jean-thorn & Hebert, 2024; Li et al., 2023). According to the World Health Organization, approximately 1 in 5 women and 1 in 13 men experience sexual abuse before the age of 18, reflecting the widespread nature of this issue across populations (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011). This alarming statistic highlights the vulnerability of children across different social and cultural contexts (Meinck et al., 2015). In Indonesia, reports from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission indicate that thousands of cases of violence against children are recorded annually, with sexual violence consistently ranking among the most prevalent forms (Arisanti et al., 2024). Alarmingly, such incidents frequently occur in environments perceived as safe, including homes, schools, and religious institutions, underscoring the urgent need for preventive efforts that are not only reactive but also educational, systematic, and developmentally appropriate (Button et al., 2024).

One of the most important preventive approaches is the provision of sexual education from an early age, which aims to equip children with basic knowledge about their bodies, personal boundaries,

and self-protection skills (Curtiss, 2018; Zhou et al., 2024) childhood sexual education does not introduce explicit sexual content but instead focuses on building awareness of bodily autonomy, privacy, and personal safety in developmentally appropriate ways (Xu & Zheng 2025). From a developmental perspective, early childhood represents a critical period in which foundational concepts related to identity and social interaction begin to emerge. Based on Erikson's psychosocial theory, children aged 3–6 years are in the "initiative versus guilt" stage, characterized by curiosity, exploration, and increasing independence (Black et al., 2017). Without proper guidance, this curiosity may lead to confusion or an inability to recognize risky situations, making early intervention through structured and age-appropriate education essential in strengthening children's awareness and resilience (Siyez et al., 2024).

However, the implementation of early childhood sexual education in Indonesia still faces significant challenges, particularly due to strong socio-cultural barriers (Elfahmi et al., 2026). Cultural norms often frame discussions about sexuality as taboo, especially when addressed to young children, which contributes to resistance from both families and educational institutions (Pratiwi et al., 2025). This perception leads to reluctance among parents and educators to introduce sexual education in a structured manner, as many adults fear that discussing such topics may encourage inappropriate curiosity (Ding et al., 2025). However, empirical evidence suggests that early sexuality education actually promotes safer behaviors and better understanding among children. This hesitation is not fully aligned with developmental perspectives, as children are capable of understanding basic concepts of body awareness, privacy, and safety when delivered appropriately (Cacciatore et al., 2024). In addition, the lack of clear guidelines and adequate training for educators further complicates the implementation process, particularly in contexts where cultural and religious considerations strongly influence curriculum decisions (Wijaya et al., 2025). Within the Indonesian context, where religious values play a central role in education, sexuality education can be integrated with moral teachings to ensure cultural relevance and acceptance (Pratiwi et al., 2025). This approach enables children to develop both cognitive understanding and moral awareness in a more holistic manner (Elfahmi et al., 2026).

Several studies have examined early childhood sexual education from various perspectives. Some studies highlight its importance in enhancing children's awareness of their bodies and personal boundaries, as well as their ability to respond to unsafe situations (Frasiska & Vitaloka, 2026; Ilyas et al., 2025). Other research focuses on parents' and teachers' perceptions of sexual education, revealing resistance influenced by cultural beliefs, limited knowledge, and uncertainty about appropriate teaching methods (Pratiwi et al., 2025). In addition, a number of studies discuss instructional strategies that can be used to deliver sexual education effectively, including storytelling, visual media, and game-based learning tailored to children's developmental levels (Najafi et al., 2024; Rodríguez et al., 2026). Such strategies aim to create a safe and engaging learning environment in which children can understand sensitive topics without discomfort (Ilyas et al., 2025). However, most of these studies remain conceptual or perception-based and tend to emphasize theoretical frameworks or attitudes rather than actual teaching practices. As a result, there is still limited empirical evidence that illustrates how sexual education is implemented in real classroom settings, particularly in early childhood institutions.

Based on these conditions, a research gap can be identified in the limited empirical studies examining how early childhood sexual education is implemented in specific educational contexts. This gap is particularly evident in institutions that are grounded in religious values, where the integration of moral teachings and educational practices requires careful consideration. Existing studies have not sufficiently explored how educators translate theoretical concepts into practical learning activities within such contexts. This study offers novelty by presenting a case study-based analysis of the implementation of sexual education practices at RA Al-Khairaat SKEP, Ternate. The study not only focuses on conceptual aspects but also integrates pedagogical, developmental, and religious dimensions within actual learning practices. By examining real classroom experiences, this research provides a more comprehensive understanding of how sexual education can be effectively delivered in culturally sensitive environments.

This study aims to examine the implementation of early childhood sexual education as a strategy for preventing child sexual abuse at RA Al-Khairaat SKEP, Ternate, Indonesia. Specifically, the study analyzes how sexual education is introduced through three main aspects: self-identity recognition, understanding of gender, and children's self-protection skills. These aspects are considered fundamental in helping children develop awareness and protective behaviors. The findings are expected

to contribute theoretically by enriching the discourse on early childhood sexual education in culturally and religiously grounded contexts. In addition, this study contributes to bridging the gap between theory and practice by providing empirical insights into implementation processes. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for educators and parents in designing developmentally appropriate and context-sensitive sexual education strategies. This study also offers implications for policymakers in developing guidelines that support the integration of sexual education into early childhood curricula.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early Childhood Development

Early childhood is widely recognized as a critical period of growth and development that encompasses physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and language domains (Black et al., 2017; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). During this stage, children experience rapid developmental changes that form the foundation for later life (Black et al., 2017). According to Piaget's theory, children aged 2–7 years are in the preoperational stage, where they begin to use symbols to represent objects and events, although their thinking is not yet logical (Piaget, 1952; Roundtree, 2021). This stage is characterized by imagination, egocentrism, and emerging representational skills, which influence how children understand their environment (Roundtree, 2021).

In addition, early childhood, typically ranging from 0 to 8 years, is often referred to as a crucial or "golden age" period due to heightened neurodevelopmental plasticity and learning capacity (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). At this stage, children are highly receptive to learning experiences delivered through formal, non-formal, and informal education (Black et al., 2017). Erikson further explains that children aged 3–6 years are in the "initiative versus guilt" stage, where they begin to take initiative, explore their surroundings, and actively engage in social interactions (Erikson, 1964; Ounjian, 2024). If children are not supported appropriately, they may develop feelings of guilt or hesitation in expressing themselves (Ounjian, 2024). Therefore, stimulation and guidance during this period play an essential role in shaping children's confidence and independence (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Early childhood development is influenced by the interaction between internal factors, such as biological maturation, and external factors, including family, school, and the broader social environment (Black et al., 2017; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). A supportive and stimulating environment can significantly enhance children's developmental outcomes, while a lack of stimulation may hinder cognitive and socio-emotional growth (Ounjian, 2024; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). For this reason, educational interventions at this stage must be designed comprehensively to address multiple domains of development (Black et al., 2017). Such interventions should provide meaningful and developmentally appropriate learning experiences that support children's overall growth and well-being (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Characteristics of Children Aged 4–6 Years

Children aged 4–6 years demonstrate unique developmental characteristics that are important to consider in educational practices. At this stage, children exhibit high curiosity and strong imaginative abilities, which play a central role in cognitive and creative development (Ernst & Burcak, 2019; Ghanamah, 2026). They begin to understand simple concepts of right and wrong, although their reasoning remains concrete and strongly influenced by immediate experiences (Chopra, 2025). Their cognitive development allows them to ask questions, explore ideas, and engage in symbolic play, which serves as an effective medium for learning and meaning-making (Cankaya et al., 2023; Gastaldi et al., 2024).

Physically, children show improved motor coordination and increased independence in performing daily activities, reflecting rapid progress in both fine and gross motor development (Ourda et al., 2025). Socially, they begin to form relationships with peers and understand basic social rules such as sharing, cooperation, and turn-taking, often facilitated through interactive and play-based contexts (Józefacka & Hamamcı, 2025; Kamal & Gabr, 2023). These characteristics indicate that children at this age are in a sensitive phase for developing self-concept and social awareness (Ghanamah, 2026). Therefore, educational approaches must be designed to match their developmental readiness and

learning styles, particularly through play-based and socially engaging learning environments (Ourda et al., 2025).

Early Childhood Sexual Education

Early childhood sexual education is an educational process that introduces children to basic concepts related to their bodies, personal boundaries, and self-protection (Rodríguez et al., 2026; Sekhar et al., 2024). It does not involve explicit discussion of sexual relations but focuses on age-appropriate knowledge about body awareness, gender identity, and safety (Lehn & Chahboun, 2025). UNESCO emphasizes that sexual education is part of comprehensive education that should be adapted to children's developmental stages (Women & UNICEF, 2018). This approach ensures that children receive accurate and relevant information without causing confusion or discomfort (Vanwesenbeeck, 2020).

Providing sexual education from an early age plays an important preventive role, as it helps children understand their rights over their bodies and recognize inappropriate behavior (Ubaidillah et al., 2023; Wijaya et al., 2025). In addition, it supports the development of healthy attitudes toward sexuality in the future (Sekhar et al., 2024). Children who feel emotionally secure and have positive relationships with teachers are more likely to engage in learning and demonstrate better social skills (Hau, 2025). This highlights the importance of creating a supportive learning environment when introducing sensitive topics.

Furthermore, early sexual education teaches children about private body parts, appropriate and inappropriate touch, and how to respond to unsafe situations, which are essential components in preventing sexual violence (Balter & van Rhijn, 2024; Ubaidillah et al., 2023). Sexual education is also closely related to character education, as it fosters values such as respect, responsibility, and self-awareness (Rodríguez et al., 2026). Therefore, it should be delivered through interactive and child-friendly methods that encourage open communication and active participation.

Objectives and Principles of Early Childhood Sexual Education

The primary objective of early childhood sexual education is to develop children's understanding of self-identity, personal boundaries, and the ability to protect themselves (Lehn & Chahboun, 2025; Rodríguez et al., 2026). It also aims to build children's confidence in expressing discomfort and saying "no" to inappropriate actions (Cacciatore et al., 2024). This education must be delivered gradually and adapted to children's developmental stages (Vanwesenbeeck, 2020). It should also consider cultural and religious values to ensure its acceptance in different contexts (Aziz, 2015).

Sex education can be distinguished into two main components. The first is sex instruction, which focuses on biological aspects such as anatomy and reproduction. The second is broader sexuality education, which includes ethical, moral, social, and relational dimensions (Mukri, 2018; Sekhar et al., 2024). For early childhood, the emphasis should be placed on the latter, as it aligns more closely with children's developmental needs (Goldman, 2013). This approach helps children understand themselves as individuals while fostering positive interpersonal relationships.

In practice, sexual education involves three key elements: information, instruction, and value formation. Information provides accurate knowledge about body parts and functions. Instruction focuses on developing practical skills, such as identifying unsafe situations. Value formation emphasizes moral and social principles, including respect and responsibility (Balter & van Rhijn, 2024; Sidiq, 2018). These elements should be integrated through play-based learning and active engagement (Cankaya et al., 2023). Educators and parents play a crucial role in guiding children and creating a safe environment for learning (Lehn & Chahboun, 2025).

Content of Early Childhood Sexual Education

The content of early childhood sexual education must be tailored to children's developmental characteristics and learning needs. It generally includes three main aspects: self-identity, gender awareness, and self-protection skills (Astuti et al., 2017). These aspects provide a comprehensive framework for introducing sexual education in a structured and meaningful way.

Self-identity involves introducing children to their names, body parts, and individual characteristics. This helps build self-confidence and self-awareness (Aprilyani et al., 2023). Gender awareness focuses on helping children understand differences between males and females without reinforcing stereotypes. This understanding supports the development of inclusive attitudes from an

early age (Kasmini et al., 2016). Self-protection skills involve teaching children about private body parts, safe and unsafe touch, and how to seek help from trusted adults (Wurtele & Kenny, 2016). These skills empower children to respond appropriately to potential threats.

In addition, learning about body parts serves as a foundational step in sexual education, as it helps children develop awareness of their bodies and personal boundaries (Rodríguez et al., 2026; Sekhar et al., 2024). Children learn the names of body parts and understand differences between male and female bodies, as well as which parts should not be touched by others (Hidayati & Nurhafizah, 2022; Suhasmi & Ismet, 2021). These materials should be delivered through engaging methods such as storytelling, visual media, and games, which have been shown to improve children's understanding of safety concepts (Pratiwi et al., 2025). Effective delivery requires educators to have sufficient knowledge and sensitivity to children's needs in order to create a safe and supportive learning environment (Lehn & Chahboun, 2025).

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

Child sexual abuse (CSA) refers to any form of sexual exploitation or coercion involving children. It includes physical and non-physical acts such as inappropriate touching, verbal harassment, and online exploitation (KPAI, 2025). According to Santrock (2014), CSA involves interactions in which a child is used for the sexual gratification of an adult. This form of abuse has severe and long-lasting impacts on children's well-being.

CSA can also be understood as a form of violence that threatens children's safety and development. It includes physical, emotional, and psychological harm inflicted by individuals responsible for the child's care (Vitri, 2024). The effects of CSA are complex and may include trauma, anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems that can persist into adulthood (Li et al., 2023). In many cases, the signs of abuse are difficult to detect because they often resemble other emotional or behavioral issues (Muliahati et al., 2022).

Given its serious consequences, CSA is both a public health issue and a violation of children's rights. Preventive measures are therefore essential to reduce risks and protect children (Mathews & Collin-Ve'zina, 2019). Early education plays a key role in equipping children with the knowledge and skills needed to recognize and avoid harmful situations (Walsh et al., 2015).

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Through Early Sexual Education

Preventing child sexual abuse requires a proactive and comprehensive approach that begins in early childhood. UNESCO states that comprehensive sexual education can enhance children's awareness and protective skills (Women & UNICEF, 2018). By providing accurate information and fostering open communication, children become more confident in expressing concerns and seeking help.

Preventive efforts should involve collaboration between families, schools, and communities. Parents play a critical role in maintaining open communication with children, while educators are responsible for delivering structured learning experiences. Strategies such as introducing body parts, using visual media, and incorporating play-based activities can make learning more effective (Alucyana et al., 2020). In addition, strengthening supervision and encouraging children's independence are important aspects of prevention (Simatupang, 2022).

Overall, early childhood sexual education serves as a strategic approach to preventing sexual violence. It equips children with knowledge, builds self-awareness, and develops protective behaviors. By integrating educational, developmental, and moral dimensions, sexual education can contribute to creating a safer environment for children and supporting their holistic development.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the implementation of early childhood sexual education as a strategy for preventing child sexual abuse. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices within their natural context (Creswell, 2013; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The case study design is appropriate as it focuses on a specific educational setting, allowing for a detailed understanding of how sexual education is implemented in practice (Yin, 2018). This approach provides a comprehensive

understanding of how sexual education is implemented in practice, particularly within real-life educational environments (Agilan, 2026).

The research was conducted at RA Al-Khairaat SKEP, located in Ternate, Indonesia. This institution integrates thematic learning with religious values and serves children aged 4–6 years, making it relevant to the focus of this study. The setting reflects an educational environment that combines pedagogical practices with moral and cultural principles. The study was carried out over a three-month period, from March to May 2025, to ensure sufficient time for data collection and observation.

Participants consisted of two teachers, two parents, and two students from group B (aged 5–6 years), selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the implementation of early childhood sexual education. Teachers were included due to their role in instructional delivery, while parents provided perspectives on reinforcement at home. Students were involved to capture their responses to the learning process. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed, with all participants providing informed consent and children participating with parental approval. Participants' identities were anonymized using codes or pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and data protection.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected using three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. These techniques were selected to ensure comprehensive data collection and to support triangulation across multiple sources. The use of multiple methods allowed the researcher to capture both perspectives and actual practices related to the implementation of early childhood sexual education.

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher, supported by interview guides and observation checklists. The interview guide was developed based on the conceptual framework derived from the literature review, focusing on three key aspects: self-identity recognition, gender understanding, and self-protection skills. The instrument was reviewed to ensure clarity and alignment with the research objectives, although it was not formally validated through external procedures. Interviews were conducted with teachers and parents to explore their experiences, perceptions, and strategies in delivering sexual education.

Participatory observation was conducted during classroom activities to examine how sexual education was integrated into thematic learning. The researcher observed teaching strategies, learning materials, and interactions between teachers and children in natural classroom settings. Field notes were recorded systematically to document significant events and behaviors. In addition, documentation techniques were used to collect supporting data, such as lesson plans, learning media, and school-related documents on child protection and character education.

The data collection process was carried out in several stages to ensure systematic implementation. First, the researcher established communication with the school and obtained formal permission to conduct the study. Second, preliminary observations were conducted to understand the classroom environment and learning context. Third, interviews and observations were carried out concurrently throughout the research period. Finally, relevant documents were collected, organized, and prepared for further analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed through several stages, including data presentation, data reduction, interpretation, and conclusion drawing, following the interactive model of (Miles et al., 2014). The data presentation stage involved organizing and categorizing information from interviews, observations, and documentation based on three main aspects: self-identity recognition, gender understanding, and self-protection skills. The data were then displayed in descriptive narratives and thematic groupings to identify patterns and relationships. Data reduction focused on selecting and simplifying relevant information, while removing repetitive or irrelevant data. This process allowed the researcher to refine the data and maintain alignment with the research objectives.

The interpretation stage involved synthesizing the reduced data into a coherent explanation of the findings by identifying patterns and relationships across categories. The researcher examined how early childhood sexual education was implemented and how participants contributed to the process. Conclusions were then drawn by integrating all findings and continuously verifying them to ensure consistency with the data. To enhance trustworthiness, triangulation was applied by cross-verifying data from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, the researcher-maintained reflexivity

and conducted cross-checking with participants when necessary to minimize bias and strengthen the credibility of the findings.

RESULTS

This study presents findings on the implementation of early childhood sexual education at RA Al-Khairaat SKEP, Ternate, Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and documentation involving two teachers, two parents, and two students aged 5–6 years. The findings are organized into three main aspects: self-identity recognition, gender understanding, and self-protection skills. Each aspect reflects how sexual education is introduced and practiced in the learning environment.

Self-Identity Recognition

The findings indicate that children have developed an understanding of self-identity through structured and interactive learning activities. Based on classroom observations, teachers introduced self-identity using songs, body movement activities, visual aids, and guided discussions. Children were encouraged to mention their full names, identify body parts such as the head, hands, and feet, and express their preferences. These activities were integrated into thematic learning and delivered in a playful manner.

Interview data support these observations. A teacher explained that identity recognition was introduced through simple and engaging methods such as songs and gestures to help children understand concepts more easily. Similarly, a parent stated that self-identity was introduced by highlighting visible characteristics, including physical features such as hair type, skin tone, and facial traits. These approaches indicate consistency between school and home practices.

Children demonstrated varying levels of understanding. One child (Z) was able to confidently state their full name and describe personal interests when asked. Another child (F) showed a good understanding of body parts but appeared less confident when expressing feelings verbally. Overall, the findings suggest that children have begun to recognize their identity, although differences in confidence levels were observed.

Gender Understanding

Gender understanding was introduced through inclusive and non-stereotypical practices. Observations showed that teachers did not restrict children's participation in activities based on gender. Boys and girls were given equal opportunities to engage in activities such as playing with dolls, toy cars, and drawing. This approach allowed children to interact freely without role limitations.

Interview findings confirm this practice. Teachers reported using storytelling to illustrate that both boys and girls can perform various roles and activities. For example, stories included boys helping with household tasks and girls participating in sports. Parents also supported this approach by explaining basic differences between boys and girls, particularly related to physical characteristics and social roles, in a simple manner.

Classroom observations further showed that children were able to cooperate across gender without distinction. Boys and girls participated in the same activities and interacted naturally. Teachers also introduced basic biological differences in an age-appropriate way, such as differences in clothing, terms of address, and the use of separate facilities. These findings indicate that gender understanding was introduced in a balanced and contextual manner.

Self-Protection Skills

The findings show that self-protection skills were introduced through structured educational activities involving both teachers and parents. Children were taught about private body parts and the concept of appropriate and inappropriate touch. Teachers used visual media such as pictures, dolls, and storytelling to explain these concepts in a child-friendly manner.

Observations indicate that children were introduced to simple protective actions, including saying "no", moving away, and reporting to trusted adults. One child (Z) was able to identify private body parts and clearly state refusal when asked about inappropriate touch. Another child (F) understood the concept but still required support in expressing discomfort verbally. This suggests that while understanding has developed, communication skills still need reinforcement.

Interview data further support these findings. Teachers and parents reported using repeated guidance and questioning to reinforce children's responses to uncomfortable situations. For example, children were asked what actions they would take if they felt unsafe, and they were guided to respond by refusing, leaving, and reporting. These practices indicate that self-protection skills were consistently introduced both at school and at home.

DISCUSSION

Developing Self-Identity as a Foundation for Early Sexual Education

The findings indicate that self-identity recognition plays a fundamental role in the implementation of early childhood sexual education. The ability of children to identify their names, body parts, and personal characteristics reflects an early stage of self-awareness. This condition aligns with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, particularly the "initiative versus guilt" stage, where children actively explore their environment and begin to develop a sense of identity and confidence (Erikson, 1964). This developmental phase is also supported by broader early childhood frameworks, which emphasize that self-concept formation is a key outcome of early learning experiences (Black et al., 2017; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). When children are supported through interactive and engaging learning activities, they are more likely to express themselves and build a positive self-concept.

Self-identity recognition also serves as an essential entry point for introducing the concept of bodily autonomy. Children who are familiar with their own bodies are better prepared to understand boundaries and personal rights, which are core components of early sexual education (Rodríguez et al., 2026; Sekhar et al., 2024). This supports the argument that early sexual education should begin with simple and concrete concepts that are closely related to children's daily experiences. Such an approach allows children to gradually construct meaning without feeling overwhelmed. In this context, play-based and thematic learning becomes an effective medium for facilitating understanding in early childhood settings, as also emphasized in developmentally appropriate practices (Cankaya et al., 2023).

Furthermore, differences in children's confidence levels highlight the importance of continuous guidance and supportive environments. Some children may require more time and encouragement to express their feelings or thoughts. This suggests that educators and parents need to collaborate in reinforcing children's self-identity development both at school and at home. A consistent approach across environments can strengthen children's sense of security and promote more active participation in learning activities. Importantly, a strong sense of self-identity also contributes to children's ability to recognize inappropriate interactions, which is a crucial factor in preventing child sexual abuse (Walsh et al., 2015).

Promoting Inclusive Gender Understanding in Early Childhood

The implementation of gender understanding in this study reflects an inclusive and non-stereotypical approach. This approach is consistent with contemporary perspectives on early childhood education, which emphasize equality and flexibility in children's roles and activities. By allowing children to participate in various activities regardless of gender, educators create a learning environment that supports autonomy and reduces early formation of rigid gender stereotypes. This aligns with UNESCO's framework on comprehensive sexuality education, which promotes respect, equality, and non-discrimination as core principles (Women & UNICEF, 2018).

Introducing gender concepts in a balanced manner also helps children develop social awareness and respect for others. When children understand that both boys and girls can perform similar roles, they are more likely to build inclusive attitudes in their interactions. This supports findings that early gender education should foster inclusivity and avoid reinforcing restrictive norms (Kasmini et al., 2016). The use of storytelling and contextual examples further strengthens children's understanding by connecting abstract ideas with familiar situations. Such strategies are consistent with research highlighting the role of symbolic play and narrative in children's cognitive and social development (Gastaldi et al., 2024).

At the same time, the introduction of basic biological differences remains important to provide accurate knowledge. However, such information must be delivered in a simple and age-appropriate way to avoid misconceptions. This ensures that children gain correct understanding without confusion. A balanced approach between inclusivity and factual knowledge also contributes to children's ability to

distinguish appropriate and inappropriate interactions. In the broader context, this understanding supports early awareness of risks associated with child sexual abuse, particularly in recognizing inappropriate behaviors from others (Mathews & Collin-Ve'zina, 2019).

Strengthening Self-Protection Skills as Preventive Measures

The development of self-protection skills is a central component of early childhood sexual education. The findings show that children begin to understand concepts such as private body parts and appropriate versus inappropriate touch. This is consistent with the guidelines proposed by UNESCO, which emphasize the importance of equipping children with protective knowledge and skills as part of comprehensive sexuality education (Women & UNICEF, 2018). Early exposure to these concepts enables children to recognize potentially harmful situations and respond appropriately. This aligns with research indicating that early sexual education plays a key role in preventing child sexual abuse by increasing awareness and protective behaviors (Ubaidillah et al., 2023; Walsh et al., 2015).

From a developmental perspective, teaching children to say "no", avoid unsafe situations, and report to trusted adults reflects the development of autonomy and decision-making skills. Erikson (1964) highlights that children in the initiative stage need opportunities to make choices and take action. When children are encouraged to express refusal and seek help, they develop a sense of control over their own bodies and actions. This empowerment is essential in reducing vulnerability to child sexual abuse, which often occurs when children lack awareness or confidence to respond (Li et al., 2023).

However, the findings also indicate that some children still face challenges in verbally expressing discomfort. This suggests that understanding alone is not sufficient, and continuous practice is needed to strengthen communication skills. Repetition, role-playing, and reinforcement from both teachers and parents are important strategies to support this development. In addition, creating a safe and trusting environment allows children to feel comfortable sharing their experiences. This is particularly important given that signs of child sexual abuse are often difficult to detect and require open communication for early identification (Muliahati et al., 2022).

Integrating Pedagogical, Developmental, and Cultural Dimensions

The implementation of early childhood sexual education in this study demonstrates the integration of pedagogical strategies, developmental principles, and cultural values. The use of thematic learning, play-based activities, and interactive media reflects developmentally appropriate practices that support children's active engagement. These approaches are consistent with research emphasizing experiential learning as an effective method for early childhood education (Cankaya et al., 2023; Ourda et al., 2025). By embedding sexual education within daily learning activities, the topic becomes more accessible and less sensitive for children.

In addition, the integration of religious and moral values provides a culturally relevant framework for delivering sexual education. This is particularly important in contexts where discussions about sexuality are often considered sensitive. Aligning educational content with moral teachings can increase acceptance among educators and parents, while also reinforcing ethical values such as respect, responsibility, and self-control. These values are essential not only for character development but also for fostering protective behaviors against potential risks.

The combination of pedagogical, developmental, and cultural dimensions highlights the importance of context-based implementation. Educational practices cannot be separated from the cultural and social environment in which they are applied. This study demonstrates that early childhood sexual education can be effectively implemented when it is adapted to local values while maintaining its core objectives. Such an approach contributes to the prevention of child sexual abuse by creating a supportive environment that enhances children's awareness, resilience, and overall well-being (Mathews & Collin-Ve'zina, 2019).

Research Implications

The findings of this study have important theoretical implications for the development of early childhood sexual education. This study reinforces the view that sexual education in early childhood should be understood as a holistic process that integrates developmental, pedagogical, and socio-cultural dimensions. By linking self-identity, gender understanding, and self-protection skills, the study extends existing frameworks of comprehensive sexuality education, such as those proposed by Women and UNICEF (2018), into a more context-sensitive model. In addition, the findings provide empirical

support for Erikson's (1964) psychosocial theory, particularly regarding the importance of fostering initiative and autonomy in early childhood. This study also contributes to bridging the gap between conceptual discussions and actual classroom practices, especially in religious-based educational settings.

From a practical perspective, the study offers guidance for educators and parents in designing and implementing early childhood sexual education. The use of thematic learning, play-based approaches, and simple communication strategies can serve as effective models for introducing sensitive topics to young children. The findings also highlight the importance of collaboration between schools and families in reinforcing children's understanding and protective behaviors. For policymakers, this study suggests the need to develop structured guidelines and training programs that support teachers in delivering age-appropriate and culturally relevant sexual education. Furthermore, integrating moral and religious values into sexual education can increase its acceptance and effectiveness in communities where the topic is still considered sensitive.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of early childhood sexual education at RA Al-Khairaat SKEP, Ternate, reflects a structured and developmentally appropriate process that integrates self-identity recognition, gender understanding, and self-protection skills. These three aspects function as interconnected components that support children's awareness of their bodies, social roles, and personal safety. The findings show that strengthening self-identity provides a foundation for understanding bodily autonomy, while inclusive gender education promotes respect and reduces early stereotyping. In addition, the development of self-protection skills equips children with the ability to recognize and respond to inappropriate situations. Taken together, these elements demonstrate that early childhood sexual education can serve as an effective preventive strategy against child sexual abuse when delivered through interactive, thematic, and child-centered approaches.

Furthermore, the study highlights that effective implementation is closely linked to the integration of pedagogical strategies, developmental principles, and cultural or religious values. This integration enhances the relevance and acceptance of sexual education in contexts where the topic is often considered sensitive. The findings also emphasize the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents in reinforcing children's understanding and protective behaviors across learning environments. Such collaboration supports consistent guidance, which is essential for strengthening children's confidence and communication skills in responding to potential risks. Therefore, early childhood sexual education should not be viewed solely as a preventive measure, but also as a holistic educational process that contributes to children's autonomy, resilience, and overall well-being.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The number of participants was limited to a small sample within a single educational institution, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts. The relatively short duration of data collection also limits the ability to observe long-term changes in children's behavior and understanding. Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, including different educational settings and socio-cultural contexts. Longitudinal studies are also needed to examine the sustained impact of early childhood sexual education on children's development, particularly in strengthening protective behaviors against child sexual abuse.

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