

A Content Analysis of Comprehensive Sex Education Guidelines in the Philippine DepEd K to 12 Curriculum

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Abstract:

This study investigates the alignment and implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) within the Philippine Department of Education's (DepEd) K to 12 curricula through a qualitative content analysis of key policy documents, notably DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2018. The findings reveal partial alignment with international standards set by UNESCO and WHO, but significant implementation gaps persist due to the curriculum's integrative structure, which compromises thematic coherence and instructional depth. Cultural and religious influences—particularly the dominance of Catholic values—serve as both facilitators and barriers, especially in addressing reproductive health and LGBTQ+ topics. Additional challenges include teacher discomfort, inadequate training, and a misalignment between national policies such as the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health (RPRH) Law and actual classroom practices. The study contributes to curriculum theory by affirming the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy, underscores the relevance of critical pedagogy in challenging dominant norms, and highlights the underutilization of human rights education frameworks. Unexpected patterns emerged, including the strong influence of teachers' personal beliefs over policy content and the exclusion of student voices in curriculum development. Practical implications point to the need for inclusive curriculum reform, enhanced teacher training, improved policy coherence, community engagement, and comprehensive monitoring systems. While the study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and the absence of direct stakeholder input, it offers a foundation for future research that incorporates empirical, stakeholder-informed approaches to better understand and improve CSE delivery across the diverse educational contexts of the Philippines.

Keywords: Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Philippine curriculum, UNESCO standards, LGBTQ+ inclusion, culturally responsive pedagogy, reproductive health education, critical pedagogy

1. Introduction

Background of the Study

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) has emerged as a globally recognized strategy to empower individuals with knowledge, values, and life skills related to sexual and reproductive health. Far beyond biological instruction, CSE addresses emotional, social, and ethical dimensions of sexuality and relationships (UNESCO, 2018). In the Philippines, the persistent rise in adolescent pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and gender-based violence reflects the urgent need for improved sexuality education. According to the Commission on Population and Development (2023), more than 500 Filipino teenage girls give birth daily, with increasing live births even among girls aged 10 to 14. These statistics signal a national crisis that education policies must urgently address. Although DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2018 institutionalized CSE in the K to 12 curricula, its implementation remains inconsistent due to cultural resistance, insufficient teacher training, and lack of instructional resources (Hernando-Malipot, 2025).

Rationale

Despite the legal mandate and policy frameworks supporting CSE in the Philippines, significant disparities exist between national policy intentions and actual classroom implementation. Many schools continue to struggle with integrating age-appropriate, inclusive, and scientifically accurate sexuality education, constrained by social taboos and religious conservatism (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2018). This study was motivated by the need to assess how well the DepEd CSE guidelines align with globally recognized standards and whether they are being meaningfully translated into practice. Given the growing concern over adolescent reproductive health, a critical evaluation of CSE integration into the basic education curriculum is necessary to inform policy adjustments and implementation strategies.

Aim of the Study

This study aims to evaluate the alignment and comprehensiveness of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education content within the Philippine K to 12 curricula. It specifically examines whether the existing curriculum, as prescribed in DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2018, meets international standards such as those developed by UNESCO and WHO. Through content analysis, the research seeks to highlight areas of strength, identify content omissions, and assess the degree to which culturally sensitive and inclusive topics are incorporated into the educational framework.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the CSE guidelines in the DepEd curriculum align with internationally recognized standards of comprehensive sexuality education?
2. What key themes and topics are emphasized in the CSE content within the K to 12 curricula?
3. Are topics such as gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender equality adequately addressed in the curriculum guidelines?
4. What omissions, biases, or culturally sensitive content may hinder the program's effectiveness?
5. What gaps and limitations can be identified in the current CSE guidelines of the DepEd curriculum?

Significance of the Study

This research provides valuable insights for multiple stakeholders in Philippine education. Policymakers and curriculum developers may use the findings to inform curricular reforms aligned with international best practices. Educators and school leaders will benefit from identifying challenges in delivering CSE and recognizing training gaps. Students and parents may gain from the improved delivery of inclusive, rights-based sexuality education, which can foster healthier relationships and responsible decision-making. Furthermore, researchers may build upon this analysis for comparative or longitudinal studies on sexuality education across different educational and cultural contexts.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study employs a qualitative content analysis methodology, relying exclusively on official policy documents such as DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2018, K to 12 curriculum guides, and CSE standards from recognized institutions. It does not include empirical data from students, teachers, or other stakeholders. The research is limited to analyzing written content and does not assess actual classroom practices or learner outcomes. It also does not account for regional or local variations in CSE implementation, which may differ significantly due to cultural and religious

diversity. Additionally, the evolving nature of public discourse and education policy on sexuality means that the findings reflect the state of the curriculum as of early 2025 and may require future updating.

2. Review of Related Literature

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is internationally acknowledged as a fundamental component of adolescent development, providing young people with knowledge, skills, and values to make informed decisions about sexual and reproductive health. Grounded in the UNESCO International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE), CSE includes eight essential domains, such as human development, gender, relationships, and sexual health, and is closely aligned with global goals like the SDGs and the earlier MDGs (UNESCO, 2018). Empirical evidence consistently supports the effectiveness of comprehensive, curriculum-based sexuality education over abstinence-only approaches, with positive impacts on adolescent knowledge, behavior, and well-being. These principles are embedded within the Philippine education system through DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2018, which institutionalizes CSE across the K to 12 curricula. This policy reflects a commitment to age-appropriate, culturally responsive, and rights-based education and is supported by various national laws and executive orders, including the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law (RA 10354), Executive Order No. 12 (2017), and EO 141 (2021). The integration of CSE within core subject areas—such as MAPEH, Araling Panlipunan, and Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao—is intended to mainstream critical topics including personhood, healthy relationships, sexual behavior, and gender and human rights education across all learning institutions.

Despite its strong policy foundation and alignment with international frameworks, the implementation of CSE in the Philippines faces considerable challenges rooted in sociocultural and institutional barriers. Teachers frequently report discomfort in teaching CSE due to inadequate training, lack of resources, and fear of community backlash, particularly from conservative and religious sectors (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021; Garcia, 2025). Parents and policymakers also express concern that open discussions on sexuality may encourage early sexual activity, contributing to resistance in local communities (Kohler et al., 2008). These concerns are compounded by limited coordination with health and social welfare agencies, especially in reaching vulnerable groups such as out-of-school youth. Moreover, culturally embedded biases and the predominance of Catholic values shape the curricular framing of sexuality in ways that often marginalize or exclude LGBTQ+ perspectives and reinforce traditional gender norms. While the policy mandates inclusive and scientific sexuality education, actual classroom delivery remains inconsistent, varying widely based on educators' personal beliefs and regional contexts.

In light of these issues, a systematic examination of the DepEd's CSE guidelines is necessary to evaluate their thematic completeness, alignment with UNESCO's international standards, and relevance within the Philippine cultural landscape. This study seeks to address the persistent gap between policy and practice by analyzing the content of CSE within the K to 12 curricula, identifying the extent to which core domains are covered, and highlighting omissions or culturally sensitive content that may affect effectiveness. Given the increasing rates of adolescent pregnancy and sexual health risks in the country, a critical review of CSE implementation is timely and essential. The findings aim to inform future curricular revisions, enhance teacher training programs, and support evidence-based decision-making that promotes inclusive, age-appropriate, and equitable sexuality education in the Philippines.

3. Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative content analysis research design to systematically evaluate the presence, depth, and thematic representation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) content in the official curriculum materials of the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd). Guided by Krippendorff's (2018) framework, the method employed a purposive sampling strategy to select documents directly related to CSE implementation, including DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2018, K to 12 Health Curriculum Guides (Grades 5–10), teacher training manuals, and the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Standards developed by the Likhaan Center for Women's Health Inc. These sources were chosen based on their accessibility, relevance, and explicit reference to CSE content. The documents were retrieved from official DepEd and academic websites, organized by type, grade level, and year,

and analyzed only if they contained substantial CSE references. A coding matrix, developed by the researcher and informed by UNESCO's (2018) International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education, provided the analytical framework. The matrix included domains such as Human Development, Relationships, Gender Roles and Equality, Consent, and Sexual Health, allowing for a systematic comparison of theme representation across the selected documents. Although adapted from international guidance, the coding structure and comparative table were original to this study, serving to identify thematic gaps, assess content consistency, and determine the degree of alignment between national curriculum documents and global CSE standards.

4. Results and Discussion

The table below presents the coding matrix developed for this study. It maps the presence or absence of core CSE themes across official DepEd curriculum and reference documents. The themes were derived from the eight key domains of the *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* (UNESCO, 2018) and contextualized for the Philippine education system.

Table 1: Coding Matrix of CSE Themes Across Curriculum Documents

Themes	DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2018	Health Curriculum Guide (Gr. 5–10)	Teacher Training Manuals	CSE Standards (Likhaan)
Human Development	✓	✓	✓	✓
Relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓
Personal Skills	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sexual Behavior	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sexual Health	✓	✓	✓	✓
Society and Culture	✓		X	✓
Gender Roles and Equality	✓	X	✓	✓
Consent and Relationships	✓	X	✓	✓
Sexual Rights and Values	✓	X	X	✓

Source: Adapted from UNESCO (2018), DepEd (2018), and Likhaan Center for Women's Health Inc. (2022)

The analysis in table 1 revealed disparities in the thematic coverage of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) across key policy documents, with DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2018, and the Likhaan CSE Standards showing substantial alignment with international benchmarks such as those set by UNESCO and WHO, while notable gaps persist in the K to 12 Health Curriculum Guide, particularly in areas like gender equality, consent, and rights. These inconsistencies are more pronounced in teacher training manuals, underscoring the need for targeted reforms in curriculum content and professional development. The coding matrix used in this study was based on UNESCO's (2018) International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education and adapted to the Philippine context using national policy documents and localized standards. DepEd's framework reflects the core elements of international guidance—emphasizing age-appropriateness, cultural relevance, and scientific accuracy—and includes themes such as human development, relationships, sexual behavior, reproductive health, and gender rights. While these align with global standards, DepEd has intentionally localized the curriculum to suit Filipino values and sociocultural realities. According to DepEd officials, UNESCO's guidance serves as a reference rather than a prescriptive model, allowing for modifications that ensure contextual appropriateness. This culturally responsive adaptation helps address stakeholder concerns about content sensitivity for various age groups while maintaining fidelity to the fundamental objectives of CSE.

In the Philippine K to 12 curricula, the Department of Education (DepEd) emphasizes seven key themes in Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as outlined in DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2018. These themes aim to provide learners with age-appropriate, culturally relevant, and rights-based education on sexuality and relationships.

Table 2. Core Topics and Subtopics for the CSE in the Philippines

Core Topic	Subtopics
Human body & Human Development	Sexual & Reproductive Body Human Development & Reproduction Puberty & Adolescence
Personhood	Values Norms Peer Influence and Life skills
Health Relationships	Families Friendships Romantic Relationships Long-term relations Marriage & Parenting Sex and Marriage
Sexuality and Sexual Behaviors	Sexuality & Sexual Life Cycle Sex and Sexual behaviors
Sexual and Reproductive Health	Reproductive Health Consequences of Early Pregnancy ST I's and HIV / AIDS
Personal Safety	Privacy & Bodily Integrity Gender-based Violence Bullying
Gender , Culture, and Human Rights	Gender Equality Media and Sexuality Human Rights

Adopted from the Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (Deped,2018)

Table 2 presents the core topics and subtopics of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as outlined in both international standards and localized curriculum documents in the Philippines. These themes are foundational to equipping learners with accurate, age-appropriate, and culturally sensitive knowledge about human sexuality. The table categorizes seven major domains: human development, personhood, healthy relationships, sexual behaviors, reproductive health, personal safety, and human rights. Each domain includes specific subtopics, such as puberty, reproductive health, life skills, gender-based violence, and media literacy. This thematic structure reflects a holistic approach, emphasizing not only biological and health aspects but also emotional, social, and ethical dimensions of sexuality. The inclusion of gender, culture, and rights ensures alignment with global CSE frameworks, promoting inclusivity, respect, and informed decision-making among learners.

Table 3. Key Concepts and Sub-topics for the CSE UNESCO (2018)

Concept	Sub-topics
Relationships	Families Friendship, Love and Romantic Relationships Tolerance ,Inclusion and Respect

	Long-term Commitments and Parenting
Values ,Rights, Culture and Sexuality	Values and Sexuality Human Rights and Sexuality Culture, Society and Sexuality
Understanding Gender	The Social Construction of Gender and Gender Norms Gender Equality, Stereotypes and Bias Gender-based Violence
Violence and Staying Safe	Violence Consent, Privacy and Bodily Integrity Safe use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)
Skills for being Health and Well-	Norms and Peer Influence on Sexual Behaviour Decision-making Communication, Refusal and Negotiation Skills Media Literacy and Sexuality Finding Help and Support
The Human Body and Development	Sexual and Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology Reproduction Puberty Body Image
Sexuality and Sexual Behavior	Sex, Sexuality and the Sexual Life Cycle Sexual Behavior and Sexual Response
Sexual and Reproductive Health	Pregnancy and Pregnancy Prevention HIV and AIDS Stigma, Care, Treatment and Support Understanding, Recognizing and Reducing the Risk of STIs, including HIV

Table 3 outlines the key concepts and subtopics central to the delivery of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as guided by UNESCO’s International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education. This thematic framework supports a holistic and rights-based approach to sexuality education, covering cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of sexual development. The table includes seven major concepts: Relationships, Values, Rights, Culture and Sexuality, Understanding Gender, Violence and Staying Safe, Skills for Being Healthy and Well, The Human Body and Development, Sexuality and Sexual Behavior, and Sexual and Reproductive Health. Each concept is supported by detailed subtopics that reflect both the diversity of learner needs and the complexity of sexuality-related issues. These include respect for human rights, gender equality, consent, bodily integrity, puberty, reproductive health, and effective communication skills. By addressing these interconnected domains, the framework ensures learners acquire not only factual knowledge but also the critical thinking and interpersonal skills necessary for making informed, respectful, and responsible decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health.

Key Findings from the Content Analysis of the Philippine Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) Guidelines

Alignment with International Standards

The Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines has shown substantial alignment with global Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) frameworks, particularly those developed by UNESCO and the World Health Organization (WHO). DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2018 reflects core principles such as scientific accuracy, age appropriateness, cultural sensitivity, and a rights-based orientation. The curriculum includes thematic domains like human development, reproductive health, gender equality, and personal safety—aligning in structure and intent with international standards (UNESCO, 2018; WHO, 2010). However, implementation gaps reveal that while global standards are referenced in policy, consistent practice remains elusive, particularly due to sociocultural constraints and fragmented delivery mechanisms.

Thematic and Curricular Integration Challenges

DepEd's adoption of an integrative model—where CSE content is distributed across multiple subjects such as MAPEH, Araling Panlipunan, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (ESP), and Science—has led to fragmented instruction and limited depth. While intended to embed CSE contextually, this model results in inconsistencies in content delivery, making pedagogical coherence difficult to achieve. Literature critiques this approach as it complicates assessment and diminishes the visibility of CSE in the curriculum (Pace & Ayres, 2020; Guttmacher Institute, 2017).

LGBTQ+ Inclusion and Gender Sensitivity

Although DepEd policy includes gender equality as a core principle, the curriculum is largely heteronormative and minimally represents LGBTQ+ perspectives. Topics related to gender identity and sexual orientation are either superficially addressed or excluded, reflecting a broader societal hesitation in discussing non-heteronormative identities (Thoreson, 2017). This exclusion contradicts UNESCO's call for inclusive, rights-based sexuality education (UNESCO, 2018) and perpetuates marginalization among diverse learners.

Teacher Preparedness and Implementation Constraints

A recurring issue is the inadequate preparation of educators to deliver CSE. Teachers often report discomfort and lack of confidence when addressing sensitive topics due to insufficient pre-service and in-service training (Manila Bulletin, 2021; Chandra-Mouli et al., 2018). This study reinforces existing literature on the need for comprehensive teacher education frameworks to ensure fidelity and quality of implementation (PIDS Reports, 2020).

Cultural and Religious Sensitivities

The dominance of Catholic moral teachings in the Philippines significantly shapes the acceptance and delivery of CSE. While cultural sensitivity is critical, it sometimes leads to censorship or exclusion of essential topics such as contraception, sexual pleasure, and LGBTQ+ inclusion. Literature and findings affirm that cultural conservatism can hinder effective sexuality education, especially in religiously influenced societies (Del Castillo et al., 2020; Thoreson, 2017).

Policy Ambiguity and Legal Misalignment

Conflicts between the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health (RPRH) Law—which targets adolescents aged 10 to 19—and DepEd's guidelines, which advocate for CSE across all grade levels, have created confusion among educators about content sequencing and age-appropriate instruction (Malaya Business Insight, 2022). This legal misalignment results in implementation inconsistencies and hinders curriculum coherence.

Monitoring and Evaluation Deficiencies

The study reveals a lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation tools for assessing CSE implementation, delivery quality, and impact on student outcomes. This deficiency limits evidence-based improvements and accountability mechanisms, echoing global critiques of underdeveloped evaluation frameworks in CSE programs (UNFPA, 2016; SSRN, 2025).

Unexpected Patterns in Delivery and Perceptions

Contrary to scholarly endorsements of the integrative model, this study finds that content integration often dilutes message clarity and instructional effectiveness (UNESCO, 2018). Furthermore, teacher values were found to heavily influence CSE content delivery, with personal religious or cultural beliefs overriding official policy—an underexplored dynamic in prior literature (Gay, 2010). The selective cultural acceptance of CSE topics—especially

related to LGBTQ+ inclusion—also reveals tensions between moral education and inclusive instruction (Thoreson, 2017). Lastly, despite students being primary beneficiaries, their voices remain largely absent in curriculum development and feedback mechanisms, reducing the program’s relevance to their lived experiences (UNESCO, 2018).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the core themes, alignment with international standards, and the contextual challenges of implementing Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in the Philippines under DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2018. While the curriculum addresses essential topics such as human development, relationships, sexual behavior, and reproductive health—mirroring UNESCO’s thematic framework—it suffers from significant implementation gaps. These include the lack of comprehensive teacher training, insufficient inclusion of LGBTQ+ perspectives, cultural and religious resistance, ambiguous age-appropriateness, and inconsistent delivery across schools due to limited resources. The findings emphasize the necessity of adapting global CSE frameworks to local socio-cultural contexts, reinforcing the theoretical importance of culturally responsive and rights-based pedagogy. Practically, they highlight the urgent need for curriculum reform, institutionalized teacher development, and sustained engagement with community stakeholders to improve the effectiveness and inclusivity of CSE in the Philippine education system.

Future research should move beyond document analysis to explore how CSE is delivered and experienced in actual classroom settings. Empirical studies involving classroom observations, surveys, and interviews with key stakeholders—including students, teachers, parents, school administrators, and religious leaders—are crucial to understanding the practical realities of CSE implementation. Further inquiry should also investigate how regional and cultural differences influence the reception and delivery of CSE across various localities in the Philippines. In particular, focused studies on the treatment—or omission—of LGBTQ+ content in the curriculum are essential to assess its impact on student inclusivity and psychosocial well-being. These research directions will provide more comprehensive insights into policy effectiveness and inform evidence-based improvements in the national CSE program.

The findings of this study highlight the urgent need to enhance teacher training by institutionalizing standardized and scalable modules that equip educators to deliver age-appropriate, gender-sensitive, and culturally responsive sexuality education (TCI Urban Health, 2020). In addition, the current CSE curriculum should be revised and expanded to include broader and more inclusive topics such as consent, sexual pleasure, gender diversity, and safe digital practices, ensuring that students receive comprehensive and relevant instruction (DepEd, 2018; Roots of Health, 2025). Active engagement with parents and community leaders through structured orientation and dialogue sessions is also essential to reduce stigma, foster cultural acceptance, and build shared support for the objectives of CSE (Inquirer.net, 2025). Finally, the Department of Education should strengthen its monitoring and evaluation systems by developing evidence-based tools that measure both the quality of implementation and the program’s impact on student knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Education Profiles, 2023).

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