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Advancing Comprehensive Sexuality Education in the Philippines: Strengthening Implementation and Overcoming Barriers

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(In substitution of Senate Bill Nos. 372, 651, and 1209 taking into consideration SRN 462)

Submitted by the Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality joint with the Committees on Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development; Health and Demography; and Finance with Senators Hontiveros, Marcos, Revilla, Jr., Angara and Go as authors

AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR A NATIONAL POLICY IN PREVENTING
ADOLESCENT PREGNANCIES, INSTITUTIONALIZING SOCIAL
PROTECTION FOR ADOLESCENT PARENTS, AND PROVIDING FUNDS
THEREFOR

Screengrab from Senate of the Philippines website

This policy brief examines a study on pre-service teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education in the Philippine basic education curriculum. Addressing issues like adolescent pregnancy, sexual violence, and gender discrimination, the study highlights the critical need for effective sex education. Despite the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012, barriers such as cultural stigma, inadequate teacher training, and limited resources hinder the successful implementation of sex education. The study's findings suggest that early, comprehensive, and inclusive sex education is essential for promoting informed decision-making among students. It emphasizes the need for sex education to cater to diverse student needs, considering their socioeconomic background and gender identity. These findings are directly relevant to Senate Bill No. 1979, the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act, which aims to standardize and strengthen sex education in schools. The bill can benefit from the study's recommendations, including revising the curriculum, improving teacher preparedness, and increasing government support for sex education programs. Additionally, integrating online learning strategies could enhance accessibility. This policy brief provides evidence-based insights to support the successful enactment of Senate Bill No. 1979 and the establishment of comprehensive sex education in the Philippines.

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Introduction

Adolescent pregnancy, sexual violence, and gender discrimination continue to be pressing issues in the Philippines, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive sexuality education in the basic education curriculum. This policy brief explores the findings of a study that examined pre-service teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of sex education in the curriculum (Badion, Benson, & Bolaño, 2023). Despite the provisions of the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012, which mandates the integration of sex education into schools, several barriers—such as cultural stigma, insufficient teacher preparedness, and lack of resources—persist and hinder effective implementation.

The study employed a qualitative research design and used focus group discussions to gather in-depth insights from pre-service teachers at a teacher education institution in Manila, specifically those pursuing degrees in science education. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to express their views on the challenges, benefits, and readiness for teaching sex education. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes and patterns in the data, such as awareness and attitudes towards sex education, cultural misconceptions, and perceived challenges in the implementation of the curriculum.

The findings offer critical insights that can inform policy decisions, particularly in relation to Senate Bill No. 1979, the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act, authored by Senator Risa Hontiveros. This bill aims to standardize and strengthen sex education in schools, and the study's findings provide valuable recommendations for its successful implementation.

Key Findings

The key findings of the study are as follows:

1. Awareness and Attitudes Towards Sex Education

Pre-service teachers expressed varying levels of awareness about the implementation of sex education in the curriculum, with some unaware of the specific policies, while others acknowledged its integration in subjects like science. There was overall support for implementing sex education as a standalone subject, starting at early educational stages. However, many felt that deeper, more comprehensive discussions would be more appropriate as students mature.

2. Stigma and Misconceptions

One of the major barriers identified was the prevailing conservative cultural attitudes towards sex education in the Philippines. The stigma surrounding discussions of sex education makes it challenging for teachers to effectively

address the topic in the classroom, particularly with younger students.

3. Challenges in Implementation

Key challenges included the need for proper instructional materials, teacher preparedness, and the cultural barriers rooted in Filipino ideologies. Pre-service science teachers also pointed out the difficulties in teaching sex education both in the classroom and through online learning setups due to issues like lack of funding, inadequate training, and the generational gap between teachers and students.

4. Perceived Outcomes

Many participants believed that the inclusion of sex education in the curriculum could lead to significant improvements in students' understanding of sexual health, reduce sexual violence, gender discrimination, and teen pregnancy, and help students protect themselves from sexual abuse. The online and face-to-face learning setups both presented advantages and disadvantages, with face-to-face interactions being favored for its ability to provide more direct guidance and ensure that students are engaged.

Implications for Policy and Practice

1. Support for the Goals of Senate Bill No. 1979

The study underscores the importance of sex education in addressing critical social issues like teenage pregnancy, sexual violence, and gender discrimination. It aligns with the objectives of Senate Bill No. 1979, which aims to reduce adolescent pregnancies by equipping youth with the necessary knowledge and resources to make informed decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health. The study's findings reinforce that early and comprehensive education on sexuality can serve as a preventive measure by raising awareness and fostering responsible behaviors among students.

2. Addressing Cultural Barriers

A significant challenge noted in the study is the cultural conservatism in the Philippines, which makes it difficult to implement effective sex education programs. This ties directly to the necessity of the proposed bill, which seeks to make comprehensive sexuality education compulsory at all levels of basic education. The study's findings suggest that overcoming societal stigma and misconceptions is crucial for the success of the bill. For the bill to be effective, it may need to include provisions for cultural sensitization and community involvement to address these deeply rooted barriers.

3. Curriculum Reforms and Teacher Preparation

The study emphasizes the need for revisions and updates to the current sex education policies, suggesting that the curriculum



should be more contextualized and comprehensive. As the bill seeks to standardize and normalize sex education across schools, it may require policy changes to ensure that teachers are adequately trained and prepared to teach the subject in a manner that respects both cultural sensitivities and scientific accuracy. Teachers' lack of confidence and readiness to teach sex education, as highlighted in the study, points to the need for mandatory teacher training programs as part of the bill's implementation.

4. Inclusivity and Comprehensive Approach

The study supports the idea that sex education should be approached in an inclusive and non-discriminatory way, considering the diverse backgrounds of Filipino students, including their socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and gender identity. This is in line with the provisions of Senate Bill No. 1979, which aims to ensure that comprehensive sexuality education is medically accurate, culturally sensitive, and inclusive of LGBTQIA+ youth. The study's findings on the need for a holistic approach to sex education can inform the design of comprehensive sexuality education programs that cater to the diverse needs of students.

5. Focus on Early Education

The study reveals a consensus among pre-service science teachers that early sex education can prevent misconceptions and help students understand their bodies and relationships at a younger age. This idea aligns with the bill's call to start sex education early in the educational system, with age-appropriate content. By focusing on younger students, the bill can help lay the foundation for informed decision-making that can prevent teenage pregnancies and other related issues.

6. Increased Government and Institutional Support

The study highlights the need for greater support from both the government and educational institutions for the successful implementation of sex education programs. The study found that low funding, lack of materials, and poor teacher preparedness were barriers to effective sex education. The proposed bill advocates for stronger institutional support, including funding, policy reforms, and stakeholder collaboration, which the study's findings can help prioritize.

7. Integration of Online Learning Modalities

The study also points out the challenges of teaching sex education in the online setup due to issues with accessibility, student engagement, and teacher preparedness. Given that the new normal has brought online education to the forefront, the bill can incorporate online teaching strategies into its implementation framework to ensure that the delivery of sex education is not hindered by the limitations of face-to-face

settings. The bill could support the development of online resources and digital platforms to enhance the reach and effectiveness of sex education, as noted in our study.

Conclusion

Our study highlights the critical need for comprehensive sexuality education within the Philippine basic education curriculum, offering valuable insights into the perceptions and attitudes of pre-service science teachers towards its inclusion. The study's findings stress the importance of overcoming cultural stigma, addressing the lack of teacher preparedness, and ensuring that sex education is adequately supported by both government and educational institutions. As Senate Bill No. 1979, the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act, seeks to address these very issues, the study's recommendations provide a strong foundation for advancing its goals. By fostering awareness, revising curricula, improving teacher training, and ensuring inclusivity, the bill has the potential to play a pivotal role in reducing adolescent pregnancy, sexual violence, and gender discrimination, ultimately equipping young people with the knowledge and skills to make informed, responsible decisions. To achieve this, a collaborative effort from all sectors, including policymakers, educators, and the community, is essential to ensure the success and sustainability of comprehensive sex education in the Philippines.

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Declaration

Sections of this brief were drafted and/or edited using AI assistance from ChatGPT. The authors verified and edited all AI-generated content to ensure compliance with ethical and scholarly standards.

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The PNU Educational Policy Research, and Development Office

The EPRDO is a specialized research center in the University focused on policy research and studies on teacher education. It is established to provide research-based policy recommendations to policy makers. It also serves as the clearing house for all data relevant to teacher education in the Philippines and beyond.

Vision

The Philippine Normal University through the EPRDO aims to be an innovation hub of teacher education research and educational policy studies.

Mission

To strengthen the culture of excellence in teacher education research and educational policy studies.

Objectives

The EPRDO shall manage the University's research production, enhance human resource capabilities, and share expertise to other Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) in the area of teacher education research

Strategies

1. Establish and maintain a web-based university research portal that facilitates automated research management systems, and which also serves as the database of teacher education policies and teacher education research in the country and Southeast Asia.
2. Share research expertise and competence in teacher education research with other TEIs throughout the country;
3. Develop and disseminate the University research agenda
4. Design and implement the research capability program for faculty and staff;
5. Manage University's research production particularly the conduct of educational policy studies in education and teacher education; and
6. Serve as the implementing arm for research incentives and research ethics review.

Values

SYNERGY (Working collaboratively as a team)
 EFFICIENCY (Delivering research services efficiently)
 EXCELLENCE (Achieving high quality research outputs)
 PRODUCTIVITY (increasing research production of the University)



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