



Sexuality Education in Sunday Schools For Children Aged 0 –12 Years

Andrew Lucas Tjong ⁽¹⁾ **Kezia Felicia Fanaya** ⁽²⁾ **Sri Binar** ⁽³⁾

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Injili Indonesia Surabaya ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾⁽³⁾
E-mail: altjong86@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Sex education for children in Sunday schools, particularly those aged 0–12 years, is a significant topic that sparks diverse opinions among church leaders. The rapid development of information technology today compels both parents and educators, within schools and churches, to provide children with sexuality education that is consistent with the teachings of God's Word. This paper, through a literature review of scholarly journals and relevant books, aims to examine the importance of sexuality education, focusing on the need to adapt it to children's developmental stages and its integration into ecclesiastical settings. Drawing from the perspective of Genesis 1:27, the goal is for children to learn to respect and honor both themselves and others, while also understanding appropriate boundaries in interpersonal relationships. Such knowledge is essential to protect children from the risk of sexual violence, which remains a critical concern.

Keywords: sex education, Sunday school, aged 0–12 years.

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INTRODUCTION

The advancement of time has made a significant contribution to various aspects of the world. One of the aspects experiencing the most rapid development is technological progress. Technological advancement can be regarded as a divine gift (Walia, Saini and Kaur, 2021). However, in addition to providing positive benefits, technological advancement has also introduced new problems for humanity (Yannoulatos, 2010). For adults, these conveniences present many possibilities that warrant careful thought and consideration; however, for children, they still need to learn and require more time to recognize and understand the world around them.

One of the most easily accessible aspects of the rapidly advancing technological era is the search for information related to sexuality through the internet. Information on sexuality, both in alignment with moral values and deviating from them, can now be easily found online. This includes content that aligns with religious teachings as well as content that contradicts religious doctrines, particularly regarding sexuality. This phenomenon presents a significant danger for children. Technological development becomes a threat during childhood, as children are in a critical stage of development, a period when their understanding of the world begins to form, including their body and sexual identity. The acquisition of incorrect knowledge regarding sexuality at this stage can have

detrimental effects. Therefore, proper and adequate sexuality education can help children develop a positive attitude toward their own existence (Farantika, Purwaningrum, Nindiya, Prawinda, Sofwan and Sanjaya, 2024).

In Indonesia, based on data from *Sistem Informasi Online Perlindungan Perempuan dan Anak* (Online System for the Protection of Women and Children), the number of cases of child abuse from January to February 2024 has reached 1,993 cases. This number is expected to continue increasing, particularly when compared to the reported cases of abuse in 2023. *Komisi Nasional Perlindungan Anak* (National Commission for Child Protection) reported that throughout 2023, there were 3,547 reports of child abuse cases. Meanwhile, from January to August 2023, there were 2,355 cases of child protection rights violations. Of this total, 861 cases occurred within educational settings. The breakdown of these cases includes 487 cases of sexual abuse, 236 cases of physical and/or psychological abuse, 87 cases of bullying, 27 cases related to the provision of educational facilities, and 24 cases related to policy issues. On the other hand, *Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak* (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection) reported that in 2023, there were 2,325 cases of physical abuse against children (Fahham, 2024). The data indicates that children within this age range are in a vulnerable condition, exposed to the risk of sexual abuse. This is due to the limited, or even complete lack of, knowledge regarding sexuality among children. Therefore, sexuality education is considered crucial to be provided from an early age. Sexuality education serves as a means to equip children with an understanding of healthy boundaries and ways to protect themselves from such acts of violence

The Church, as part of society, shares the responsibility of preventing similar actions from occurring in the future by providing sexuality education for Sunday school children, particularly those within the age range of 0–12 years. In light of this issue, this paper will examine the urgency of sexuality education for children aged 0–12 years and explore the content and implementation of sexuality education based on the values of Scripture.

RESEARCH METHOD

Based on the explanation in the introduction regarding two key aspects, namely sexuality education and the topics to be addressed based on the values of Scripture, the research methodology employed in this paper uses two approaches: literature study and hermeneutics.

Literature study is an effort undertaken by the researcher to gather data through relevant literary sources related to the research topic (Manik and Tular, 2022). The literary sources referred to may include books, literature, journals, and relevant internet search results related to the research topic (Samala, Ambiyar, Jalinus, Dewi and Indarta, 2022). In the literature study, the author will conduct a review and analysis of scholarly writings pertinent to the discussion, such as books, journals, and official articles related to Sunday school, as well as the objectives and significance of sexuality education for Sunday school children.

The author also conducts an exploration of the Scriptures to affirm the arguments discussed in this study. The examination of the Scriptures in this research includes a review of sexuality, drawn from Genesis 1:27. Since the author is engaging in an exploration to seek the meaning of a specific biblical text, the literature study method cannot be used; instead, a hermeneutical approach is employed (Sumaryono, 1999). In this hermeneutic approach, three basic analyses can be used: contextual analysis, grammatical analysis, and lexical analysis (Lucas and Binar, 2024). However, in this writing, the author will focus only on contextual analysis, drawn from the entire first chapter, as the focus of this work is not a hermeneutical study, and the role of hermeneutical study is merely supportive. In the contextual analysis, the author will examine verses that have a logical flow with the text being studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, there are several aspects presented by the author, including those related to the concept of sexuality education, the objectives of sexuality education, overview of Sunday school, the significance of sexuality education for children, biblical foundation for sexuality education, and design of sexuality education material.

Concept of Sexuality Education

In general, sexuality education is a comprehensive approach designed to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to make informed decisions regarding their sexual health and behavior. Sexuality education covers various topics, such as reproductive anatomy, sexual relationships, contraception, consent, and sexual health. The goal of this educational process is to empower individuals to develop a healthy attitude towards sexuality and effectively manage various aspects of sexual health. Sexuality education not only includes an understanding of the biological or physiological aspects of sexual life but also encompasses discussions on psychological, social, cultural, religious, and health-related aspects (Utama, Hidayati and Sari, 2022).

In the context of Christian faith, sexuality education is an effort to shape views, values, behaviors, attitudes, and actions towards sexuality by teaching, raising awareness, and providing accurate and comprehensive information based on the Word of God, so that sexuality is used in accordance with the purpose established by God (Manik and Tular, 2022).

Objectives of Sexuality Education

The objectives of sexuality education can be classified into two categories: general objectives and specific objectives. The general objective of sexuality education is to introduce children to the concept of gender (male and female) and to teach them how to maintain health, hygiene, safety, and security related to these aspects (Alucyana, Raihana and Utami, 2022).

Specifically, sexuality education for children should be categorized according to their developmental age groups, namely toddlers (under five years old), children aged 6–10 years, and children aged 11–12 years. For children under the age of five, the objective of sexuality education is to introduce them to their sexual organs, explaining them in the same manner as other body parts, including the function of these organs and how to protect them. This is an essential topic to teach to children under the age of five because, if not addressed early, it may lead to issues such as habits of touching their genital areas before sleep or touching others' breasts, among other concerns. Sexuality education for children aged 6–10 years aims to help them understand the differences between genders (male and female), inform them of their identity, and teach them how to properly clean and maintain their genital organs to prevent germs and diseases. This is crucial because at this age, children begin to develop their social skills. They are entering school and starting to interact with peers outside of their immediate family. At this stage, children begin to recognize themselves as either male or female, and therefore, they must be taught to respect the opposite gender. For children aged 11–12 years, sexuality education should address puberty and its characteristics, as well as help them accept the changes in their bodies. This is particularly important because this age range marks the preparation phase for puberty, where children need to understand menstruation (for girls) and nocturnal emissions (for boys) to avoid fear or confusion when these changes occur. At this stage, children should be taught and encouraged to be open with their parents about everything they experience and feel (Yusuf, 2022).

Among the three age ranges, the author places particular emphasis on children aged 11–12 years. At this stage, before children enter adolescence, foundational knowledge about health and sexuality should be taught effectively

and appropriately, as proper sexuality education significantly impacts the development and future of children. During this period, children are also introduced to various topics such as sexually transmitted diseases, the dangers of premarital relationships, and the health of sexual organs, topics that may have previously been overlooked. This highlights that the benefits of sexuality education are widely recognized in equipping students with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions and avoid potential risks (Cristeaa, Dan and Serbanc, 2024).

Overview of Sunday School

Sunday school is a Christian education program specifically organized for children within the church. The primary goal of this program is to teach Christian faith to children using methods suited to their developmental stages. The lessons provided include Bible stories, moral values, prayers, and activities designed to help children understand and grow in their faith (Smith and Roehlkepartain, 2017). Sunday school serves as a place of instruction, where children meet God the Father, allowing them to experience growth in their knowledge of God and live in accordance with His will (Manik and Tular, 2022). Ministry in Sunday school is of great importance, as children need to be properly educated to understand and know God, and to deeply apply Christian values in their daily lives.

Sexuality education cannot be separated from Sunday school, as the primary goal of Sunday school is not only to teach Bible stories but also to help children apply Christian values in their lives (Smith and Roehlkepartain, 2017). Therefore, it can be understood that sexuality education is an essential part of instilling Christian values in life, enabling them to be correctly applied from a young age. Sexuality education is particularly important to teach at this stage for two main reasons. First, the rapid advancement of information and communication technology today has made children quickly connected to various types of information, both positive and negative, in a very short time. However, children at this age are not yet capable of discerning or deciding what is good or harmful for themselves. Thus, sexuality education is expected to equip them with the tools to filter and choose the information they receive, guiding them to make the right decisions and actions in response to that information (Manik and Tular, 2022). The fact that sexual violence against children is a growing concern, as indicated by data from various institutions and ministries, is deeply troubling (Fahham, 2024). It is heartbreaking when children become victims of violence without even realizing it. The impact of such violence is devastating for children. Naturally, parents and Sunday school teachers do not want children to experience this, which is why it is crucial to implement sexuality education from an early age (Manik and Tular, 2022).

Significance of Sexuality Education for Children in Sunday School

Sunday school impacts various aspects of children's development, including their moral values, cultural identity, and social skills, as it effectively shapes their worldview and plays a significant role in the formation of character within their community. Sunday School, with its age-specific programs tailored to children's developmental stages, serves as a means for children to effectively instill the values of Christian faith (Joseph, 2024).

Sexuality education for young children is regarded as crucial due to the rising rates of violence against children. Early childhood sexuality education is seen as an essential means to help reduce incidents of sexual violence among children. Ideally, children should start receiving sexuality education at the age of 3. However, at the age of 2, they can begin to be introduced to aspects of sexuality education through practices like toilet training (Farantika et.al., 2024). For children under 2, it is important to start instilling the values of God's Word concerning matters related to sexuality.

Biblical Foundation for Sexuality Education for Sunday School

Although the Bible does not explicitly provide a method for sexuality education for children, it affirms the necessity of equipping children with the teachings of God's Word. Proverbs 29:17 clearly instructs that children should be taught, emphasizing that this command, although directed to parents, aims for the ultimate well-being and joy of the children in their future lives. Regarding the content of sexuality education, it can be grounded in biblical principles, particularly in Genesis 1:27.

For the contextual analysis, the focus will be on the broader context of Genesis 1, with particular attention given to Genesis 1:27. This verse clearly declares that God created humankind in His image, specifically as male and female. It emphasizes that both male and female are equally created in God's image, asserting that all human beings are made in God's likeness, without any hierarchy between them. The distinctions between male and female do not diminish the truth that all humanity is made in God's image. In Genesis 1:26, the creation of humanity is portrayed as God's initiative, underscoring that He deliberately designed humans in a unique way, distinct from all other creatures. Throughout the first chapter of Genesis, only humanity is described as being made in God's image, while the rest of creation is not. Additionally, God bestows a special responsibility and honor upon humanity, granting them dominion over all other created beings (Gen. 1:26, 28). Among all God's creations, only humanity is described as "very good" (Gen. 1:31), in contrast to the rest, which are merely called "good" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25).

Genesis 1:27 and the entirety of chapter 1, which provides the context for this verse, present an important truth about humanity from a divine perspective, including:

Firstly, humans are created among all creatures with a dignity that surpasses all creation, making humanity truly valuable in the eyes of God. Therefore, it is essential to honor one another as fellow human beings created in God's image.

Secondly, God created humanity in two forms: male and female. They are different, yet one in their humanity, both made in His image. This difference does not signify weakness but rather highlights God's power and the wisdom of His will in the creation of humankind. God created only male and female, and this fact teaches children not to be swayed by worldly teachings that contradict God's Word. It is important to teach children that there are only two genders: male and female, without a third or any other form.

Thirdly, the nature of humanity, as established by God in His divine wisdom during creation, is to live as His image, striving to reflect His likeness. This indicates that from the very beginning, humans were created very good and sinless, truly reflecting or manifesting God's attributes in human life, including spiritual, moral, and personal aspects. Both males and females are equally good in God's eyes, and there is no one who is "better" or "lesser" before God. Children need to be taught to thank God for their creation as they are and not to entertain thoughts of wishing to be the opposite gender.

Design of Sexuality Education Material for Sunday School

Based on the foundation of God's Word taken from Genesis 1:27 and the theological values outlined within it, the design of sexuality education material for Sunday school children can be outlined as follows:

Firstly, educating children to recognize and understand their own identity, and to embrace and be thankful for their existence as male and female. Secondly, instilling in children the belief that both males and females hold equal worth in the eyes of God, with no hierarchy between them. All are human beings created in His image, and each child is precious in God's sight, with a unique purpose. Thirdly, educating children about the physical differences between males and females, which may also involve teaching basic anatomical terms and their functions. It is crucial to stress

that these terms for sexual organs should never be used in a mocking way or spoken carelessly without considering the social context.

Fourthly, providing education on sexuality that highlights the distinct characteristics of males and females as designed by God, and guiding children on how to appropriately dress according to their gender. Fifthly, offering lessons about family and community, focusing on the child's immediate family, extended family, and others in their social environment. This instruction can also include establishing boundaries that children should respect with regard to their family and others outside the family. Sixthly, teaching about privacy and the boundaries children should observe according to their developmental stage, and helping them recognize the different types of touch they may experience, distinguishing between affectionate or caring touch and inappropriate or abusive touch. Seventhly, educating children on how to care for and safeguard their bodies, ensuring they maintain health and avoid harm to any part of their bodies, including their sexual organs. It should also be instilled early on that a child's ability to protect themselves reflects gratitude toward God. Eighthly, providing teaching on the concept of a suitable life partner, emphasizing to children the kind of partner God desires, specifically a partner who is male and female.

CONCLUSION

Teaching material on sexuality education to children is certainly not an easy task. There are many challenges that Sunday school teachers or instructors will face when addressing this topic. However, sexuality education for children is considered crucial due to the rising incidence of violence against children. In implementing the teaching of topics related to sexuality education, there are several important aspects that must be carefully considered.

First, Sunday school teachers must accurately name the sexual organs (penis for males and vagina for females). Commonly used slang terms for genitalia should also be avoided. It must be emphasized that terms for sexual organs should not be subjects of ridicule or used carelessly, without regard for place and time.

Second, when teaching topics related to sexuality education, the language style and vocabulary should be adjusted to the developmental stage and age of the children. Sunday school teachers must thoroughly understand the material they intend to teach and prepare answers for any potential critical questions from the children. At certain times, each Sunday school teacher may need guidance from the Sunday school leader or pastor when addressing this topic.

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