

SEX EDUCATION AND NEW EDUCATION POLICY IN INDIA: TOWARDS A BETTER JUVENILE SYSTEM

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Abstract

In India, the debate and discussions on comprehensive sexuality education continue to be divided on issues of cultural unease, societal issues, policy confusion, and legal inattention and is mostly unseen in school's curriculum. The well-drafted National Education Policy, 2020, stresses life skills, socio-emotional learning, and all-around development of a child, but does not go so far as to make a direct inclusion of sexuality education into the standard curriculum. With the right to education being part of a fundamental right in India, comprehensive sex education is yet to be formally mandated in schools and the paper argues the need of it in schools. The demand for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is no longer pedagogical; it is an issue of legal right, constitutional sense, and human rights fulfilment. This paper examines the need for comprehensive sexuality education in India and has traced data from the National Crime Records Bureau and found that most juvenile offences are committed by boys between 14-18 years of age. Examining the data, the paper revisits the National Education Policy of 2020 and makes the case for sex education being included in the standard curriculum. We have looked at the possibilities of making CSE part of constitutional rights and the challenges of its implementation in India. The paper is a study of juvenile crime, emotional illiteracy and the cost of silence, and our conclusion lies in the fact that we might be silent on sex education, the internet won't. In finality, it can be said that while we have the right to education in India, we need to develop the right to sex education so that juveniles can be made aware, leading to fewer crimes.

Keywords: comprehensive sex education, juvenile education, crime prevention, right to education, new education policy

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Introduction

“In India, adolescence is usually a period of unspoken changes, hidden questions, and shame-filled searches.”

India has the world’s largest adolescent population at over 253 million people aged between 10-19 (Pandurang, 2022). Despite the demographic profile, adolescents in India come of age with very little, or in some cases, no access to organised and age-specific information on their bodies, relationships, or emotional health (Sunitha, 2014). In an over-connected society where more than a quarter of Indian internet consumers are teenagers, peers, internet searches, and pornography are commonly their first sources of information about sex and identity, rather than organised education or mature adults (Abhijita, 2022). The result is a culture in which false information flows better than facts, and emotional disorientation is greeted with silence, not compassion. The goal of this research paper is to examine this silence from a constitutional and policy perspective. It aims to show that Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is a requirement that stems directly from the Indian Constitution’s guarantees of sexuality education, privacy, and dignity.

While the Right to Education as provided explicitly in Article 21A and the Right to Privacy and Bodily Autonomy as developed by the Supreme Court of India through Article 21 are constitutionally protected in India, CSE is still not recognised as part of a child’s educational or personal rights (Joseph, 2023). Adolescents are enabled to meaningfully exercise their rights in both the public and private domains when CSE is positioned within these constitutional protections, preventing them from being forced to fend for themselves against false information. In the majority of Indian schools, sex-related topics are either completely omitted or just briefly mentioned in biology texts (Jose, 2024). Young people must confront these realities alone, ignorant, and exposed, since extremely significant topics like emotional control, internet safety, consent, pleasure, gender identity, menstruation, wet dreams, and masturbation are either stigmatised or not mentioned at all (Pant, 2025).

For example, boys who are experiencing wet dreams or the urge to masturbate tend to do so in secret and without any idea of what these things mean (Meltzer, 2022). Without safe and trusted adults to speak with, many

go online for answers and are rapidly immersed in violent and distorted representations of sexuality via pornography (Taylor, 2018). Menstruation, too, a girl's first embodied encounter with womanhood, is something from which boys are deliberately excluded, one that must be kept hidden, something shameful (Bobel, 2020). The outcome is a generation that becomes emotionally disjointed, sexually ill-informed, and socially isolated (Gullette, 2004). Beneath the statistics on juvenile sexual offences lies a quieter truth: what is often labelled as deviance is, in many cases, the confused search for understanding in the absence of honest guidance.

These silences have consequences in the real world (Sauntson, 2021). As per National Crime Records Bureau (*hereinafter*, NCRB) data, a majority of juvenile offences under the POCSO Act are made by boys between 14 and 18 years of age (Kabasi, 2023). Most are not repeat offenders or criminally inclined but rather uninformed teenagers who have never learned the legal, ethical, or emotional models for comprehending boundaries, consent, or consequence (Schissel, 2021). On this account, the failure to provide sexuality education not only fails to safeguard youth but also criminalises their ignorance (Galer, 2022). Concurrently, national policy documents such as the New Education Policy (*hereinafter*, NEP) 2020 stress life skills, socio-emotional learning, and all-around development, but do not go so far as to make a direct inclusion of sexuality education into the standard curriculum. Absent a legal requirement and social agreement, even so-called progressive policies are selectively implemented, patchily implemented, or not implemented (Veeraraghavan, 2024).

The four main goals of incorporating CSE into the curriculum are firstly, to give teenagers accurate, age-appropriate, and culturally sensitive information about their bodies and relationships; secondly, to give them social and emotional skills like empathy, consent, and respect that can help them avoid harming themselves or others; thirdly, to end the cycle of stigma and false information that currently encourages unhealthy behaviours and juvenile offenses; and lastly to bring India into compliance with its international commitments under the ICPD Programme of Action and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which both highlight the importance of sexuality education for public health and development.

In our paper, we have looked at answering this critical and multifaceted gap by examining three key research questions: in what ways can CSE be established and implemented as an inalienable right under Indian Constitutional law, specifically under Articles 21 and 21A?; how is there a connection between the lack of CSE and the emergence of emotional distress, misinformation, and juvenile sexual offences among Indian youth? And how can policy instruments such as the NEP 2020 and the Right to Education Act best be utilised to institutionalise CSE in Indian schools in a culturally responsive, age-specific, and legally enforceable manner?

Such questions demand a multidisciplinary response, drawing on constitutional law, adolescent psychology, education policy, and sociology. It demands a realisation that teenagers are not mere fact learners but identity explorers, emotion regulators, and social complexity managers (Zhang, 2023). It demands facing the generational gap, where elder policymakers and educators might be reluctant to talk, even as younger generations become more willing to listen and change (Georgescu, 2024).

CSE is not about promoting early sex. It is about creating an ecosystem of awareness, respect, and resilience (Seiler-Ramadas, 2021). It is about empowering young people to know their bodies without shame, to guide relationships with empathy, and to make decisions based on consent and clarity (Wood, 2025). In addition to promoting change, its goal is to make sexuality education a constitutional requirement and an essential public health measure. It is about ensuring that silence does not mould the most defining years of a person's life. This article contends that the day has arrived when India needs to recognise sexuality education not as a voluntary intervention, but as a constitutional imperative, a public health measure, and overdue educational reform.

Mapping the Literature Review

Statement on the Importance of Sexuality and Gender Research by Cynthia Graham highlights the value of studying gender and sexuality in order to address past social, cultural, and health disparities (Graham, 2025). Furthermore, it argues that political limitations on transgender, gender, and LGBT words are tantamount to scientific censorship and endanger research integrity and intellectual independence. The risk of this kind of censoring is

that it will deliberately leave out disadvantaged groups while impeding public health initiatives and larger social justice campaigns.

Critical Consciousness and Sex Positivity: Opinions on Race Play within Alternate Sexuality Communities by James E. Brooks examines the relationship between race, sexuality, and sexual autonomy in kink with a focus on race as a tactic that purposefully manipulates racial relationships and stereotypes (Brooks, 2025). The study illustrates the ethical tensions between individual sexual freedom and racial responsibility by demonstrating how participants' sex-positive orientations and awareness of institutional racism interact to shape their views on race. A sophisticated framework for comprehending how overlapping racial and sexual ideologies influence moral sexual behaviour, agency, and evaluative judgments within alternative sexual communities is presented by Brooks, who connects critical awareness with sex-positive beliefs.

Euphorias in Gender, Sex and Sexuality Variations uses the notion of "euphoria" to analyse how repressive sociocultural and institutional circumstances provide pleasure and validation for oppressed gender, sex, and sexuality groups (Tiffany, 2023). She develops an ecological framework that pinpoints the structural, cultural, and personal factors that impact euphoric experiences using survey data from intersex and LGBTQ+ participants. The research highlights the subversive possibilities of being "euphorically queer," emphasising how exclusion both generates and restricts options for delight. Jones advocates for the advancement of pleasure and affirmation in underrepresented groups, urging gender and sexuality research to transcend oppression and distress (Jones, 2023).

Teaching about Sex and Sexualities in Higher Education by Susan Hillock is a critical, multidisciplinary examination of pedagogical practices in higher sexual education (Hillock, 2021). For educators to successfully negotiate the intricate, emotive, social, and ethical facets of sexuality, the volume emphasises the need to equip them with both intellectual and practical expertise. Contributors offer evidence-based suggestions for the creation of an inclusive, reflective, and responsive curriculum that meets a range of student experiences by critically examining current discussions, diversity models, and new issues. Hillock's study highlights the importance of educator preparation

in defining transformational learning settings and sexual literacy advancement in higher education environments by emphasising professional development, reflective practice, and teaching efficacy.

A Critical Analysis of Juvenile Justice Delivery Mechanism in India with Special Reference to Heinous Crimes by Gunjan Srivastava, 2020 is a study on juvenile justice and heinous crimes committed by children in India (Srivastava, 2020). The repercussions of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, as well as heinous crimes like child sex, are the main topics of this book's critical analysis of India's juvenile justice system. *Engaging Youth in Activism, Research, and Pedagogical Praxis: Transnational and Intersectional Perspectives on Gender, Sex, and Race* by Tamara Shefer provides a thorough, cross-border analysis of programmatic, activist, and educational interactions with young people in the Global North and South (Shefer, 2018). The book reveals the institutional, cultural, and structural barriers to young people's agency by critically analysing how the intersecting axes of sexuality, gender, racism, class, age, ability, and health impact their lives. The work centres adolescents as agentic participants in social justice praxis and promotes a transdisciplinary framework that synthesises local and global knowledges, drawing on a cooperation between Finland and South Africa. The authors show how intersectional, contextually grounded methods may foster critical consciousness, empowerment, and revolutionary educational and activist results by questioning prevailing theoretical frameworks and traditional pedagogical practices.

Risky Lessons: Sex Education and Social Inequality by Jessica Fields examines critically the manner in which sex education within the United States is both informed by and reflects social stratification (Fields, 2017). From an intersectional perspective, fields illustrates how subordinated teens are disproportionately exposed to risk-based, prescriptive education, while their more advantaged counterparts receive full-spectrum, empowerment-based education that promotes agency and competent decision-making.

The Limits of Sexuality Education: Love, Sex, and Adolescent Masculinities in Urban India by Ketaki Chowkhani is a study of institutional and sociocultural dimensions of sexuality education in urban Indian schools

(Chowkhani, 2017). The author describes how curricula have been narrowly circumscribed by prescriptive and heteronormative frameworks that restrict students' engagement with sexual autonomy, consent, and desire through the systematic study of adolescent masculinities. The article points to the extent to which gender norms and institutionalised routines limit the emancipatory potential of sex education, and to how great a disparity exists between policy objectives and adolescents' everyday lives.

Curriculum Realities and the Structural Limits

It is important that any discussion on CSE in India is preceded by a detailed examination of the curricular framework through which adolescents are currently exposed to sexuality, body development, and reproductive health and there has been a common perception in Indian society that sexuality education is completely absent in Indian classrooms. (Chakraborty, 2021). This is not entirely true! There is a presence of elements related to body development, reproductive health, and adolescent development in the school curriculum (Utami, 2024). These elements are present in a fragmented manner, are largely biological in content, and are pedagogically insufficient in engaging with the overall social, psychological, and relational dimensions of sexuality, which are now considered important in educating adolescents in a globalized world. The curriculum designed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), which is considered a primary source of school education in India, reflects this gap with clarity.

In the upper primary stage, the NCERT textbook for Class VIII Science introduces the concept of adolescence to the students in the form of a chapter titled, "*Reaching the Age of Adolescence.*" The chapter mentions the biological changes that occur during puberty, the development of secondary sexual characteristics, the biological maturation of the reproductive system of the body, personal hygiene, balanced nutrition, and physiological changes in the body during adolescence in both boys and girls (Koul, 2022). From a scientific point of view and the age-appropriate learning, the students are provided with accurate knowledge about the changes that occur during puberty, i.e., the *endocrinological changes* that occur in the body during puberty, the maturation of the reproductive system of the body, etc., in the chapter. However, the concept of adolescence is limited to biological changes only, and no information is

provided to the students about the emotional and psychological changes that occur during the adolescent phase of life. Therefore, it can be stated that adolescence is a purely biological phase of life, as per the implications of the curriculum, rather than a multidimensional phase of life that is a phase of life in which the formation of identity, social life, and emotions occur.

This reductionist approach can be seen even more clearly in higher secondary education, specifically, in the Biology textbook for Class XII, two chapters “*Human Reproduction*” and “*Reproductive Health*” discuss issues of sexuality (Ampatzidis, 2022). In these chapters, the biological aspects of reproduction, fertilization, pregnancy, contraception, treatment of infertility, and the spread of venereal diseases are explained in great detail, in addition to these, the population growth and the population planning policies of India are also discussed, as India has a long history of population control measures. Thus, the inclusion of these issues in the curriculum ensures that the student gains a scientific knowledge of the issues of sexuality. Nevertheless, even at this advanced level of schooling, sexuality remains an issue discussed only within the realm of reproductive biology.

Key concepts pointed out in contemporary models of CSE, such as *consent, sexual orientation, gender identity, healthy relationships, and emotional communication*, are not only briefly discussed but also ignored altogether, another notable aspect, there is a lack of discussion on how to deal with changing digital spaces and how adolescents are increasingly exposed to sexuality through social media and online spaces (Maes, 2022). This means that while there is technical knowledge on how reproduction occurs, there is an absence of knowledge on how to interpret and deal with the social realities surrounding sexuality in modern society.

This approach has been “*biological reductionism*” from an educational perspective, which sees sexuality being reduced to biological processes and reproductive activities without considering other cultural, ethical, and emotional contexts in which sexual identity and behaviour develop (Mahardhika, 2026). The educational implications of this limitation are also important to discuss, for example, *adolescents don't experience sexuality in terms of physiological changes alone, but also in terms of interplay with family, peers, media, and their own developing identity* (Kaestle, 2021). If formal education only offers

biological knowledge, then adolescents may end up looking for knowledge from other sources, which may be incomplete and inaccurate in their representation of sexuality and thus contribute to sexual myths and unhealthy behaviours.

Despite such structural limitations, it would be a mistake to argue that Indian policymakers have totally neglected the issue of adolescent sexual and reproductive health and over the past two decades, a number of initiatives have been undertaken to meet the informational and psychosocial demands of adolescents beyond the formal school curriculum, the most important initiative in this context has been the Adolescence Education Programme, which was designed in collaboration with the Central Board of Secondary Education with the support of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The Adolescence Education Programme (AEP) was initiated in the mid-2000s as a part of India's HIV/AIDS prevention strategy, with the aim of equipping adolescents with knowledge on reproductive health, gender equality, and life skills.

Unlike conventional classroom teaching methods, AEP placed emphasis on participatory methods of teaching. Classroom discussions, group teaching, and interactive activities were employed to motivate young people to engage with issues such as communication skills, decision-making, self-esteem, and gender sensitivity, among others. The teachers were provided with training manuals that would help them conduct discussions on issues such as puberty, reproductive health, HIV prevention, and respect for diversity, among others. This programme attempted to cover some of the psychosocial aspects of young people's development that are not included in conventional text materials.

Nevertheless, the institutional form of AEP points to the precarious nature of India's present strategy in dealing with issues of sexuality education. The AEP, for example, is implemented in the form of a co-curricular activity rather than being made compulsory in the form of an examinable subject. This makes it difficult to achieve any sort of uniformity in the implementation of the program because there are significant variations in its implementation in different states and schools. In addition to this, in some states, opposition to the program on the basis of cultural or moral grounds has also led to the postponement or modification of the activities included in the program. The absence of any legally enforceable mandate in the implementation of the program makes any

sort of discussion on the issue dependent on the comfort levels of individual teachers, as well as the socio-political scenario in which they are functioning.

Another example of initiatives at the State level serves to further highlight the possibilities and challenges of what is being achieved by educational methods at present. One of the more creative initiatives can perhaps be seen in the social and emotional learning initiative of the Jharkhand government, dubbed by many as the *Harsh Johar Curriculum* (TOI, 2024). In partnership with educational organisations, this initiative was carried out in all government schools, focusing on the emotional intelligence of young people, as well as their capacity for empathy and social skills, through discussions, storytelling, and reflective learning, students are encouraged to think critically about issues such as self-identification, respect, equality between genders, and decision-making skills.

Even though there is no explicit presentation of the Harsh Johar Curriculum as an instrument for sexuality education, there are several aspects that are discussed which are considered core elements in any modern model of CSE. Through the debate on peer relations, social pressures, and stereotypes in gender roles, there is an indirect focus on the social context in which adolescent sexuality is experienced. Through an emphasis on emotional intelligence and communication, there is an illustration of how culturally sensitive pedagogical practices can be used to engage with issues of adolescent development without evoking any resistance that might be generated by an explicit focus on sexuality education.

Yet such initiatives are limited in their geographical reach and institutional strength. Their effectiveness also relies on state-specific policy focus rather than a uniform national policy strategy. Therefore, access to structured education for adolescents continues to differ substantially from place to place in the country. In most parts of the country, adolescents receive very little formal guidance on issues such as consent, body autonomy, or online safety.

The necessity to bridge this policy gap becomes more apparent when viewed comparatively. For example, various countries have incorporated and implemented the inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education in their national curriculum. In Argentina, the Comprehensive Sexual Education Law is a law that requires all schools, whether public or private, to include age-

appropriate comprehensive sexual education in the curriculum that promotes gender equality, reproductive rights, diversity, and bodily autonomy (Rodríguez, 2026). In the Netherlands, the policy has gone beyond this and incorporated the inclusion of sexuality education in all levels of primary education and in Dutch educational policy, emotional intelligence, respect, communication, and consent are included in the curriculum (Fitzwater, 2025).

Likewise, Canadian provincial education systems have incorporated sexuality education within the overall context of adolescent mental health, digital literacy, and safe school environment programmes, also, these programmes specifically address issues such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and healthy relationships (Maradiya, 2026). This provides adolescents with a framework for understanding both the biological and social dimensions of sexuality, some of the empirical research studies conducted within these jurisdictions consistently show that comprehensive sexuality education improves adolescent well-being, increases knowledge of consent and gender equality, promotes delayed initiation of sex, and reduces risk of sex exploitation.

When this is viewed against the backdrop of what is happening internationally, it can be seen that the present system of education in India can perhaps only be termed a transitional one rather than a fully institutionalized one, also while a great deal of valuable information on reproductive biology is contained within textbooks, additional programs provide some information on psychosocial issues.

The challenge facing India, therefore, is not merely to introduce sexuality education, but to integrate all educational, health, and social initiatives into a comprehensive framework that acknowledges the following: adolescent sexuality cannot be addressed in purely biological terms, as it also involves emotional development, relationships, gender equality, and digital citizenship, among other dimensions. By broadening the current educational focus to take in these dimensions, the education system can transcend a purely biomedical model of sexuality to a more holistic model of adolescent development.

Such a reform would not only enhance educational outcomes but also ensure greater conformity between educational policy and constitutional values of dignity, equality, and informed personal autonomy. Adolescents need more

than a body of factual information about reproduction; they need the ethical, emotional, and social competencies required to responsibly interpret their experiences in a rapidly more complex social and virtual world. An educational approach capable of engaging with such realities is not only desirable; it is also essential in meeting the needs and aspirations of young people in India.

Why Comprehensive Sexuality Education must be a Legal Right

In contemporary India, the dialogue on sexuality education continues to be divided on issues of cultural unease, policy confusion, and legal inattention (Taverner, 2023). As today's teens are brought up in a digitised, fast-evolving world, the law still remains to be convinced of their right to basic, systematic, and science-based education on issues of body, identity, relationships, and consent (Agren, 2020). The demand for CSE is no longer pedagogical; it is an issue of legal right, constitutional sense, and human rights fulfilment (Shefer, 2018).

This argument is based on the interpretive enrichment of the Indian Constitution, specifically its focus on individual dignity and integrative education. Article 21A, the right to free and obligatory education for children between the ages of 6 and 14, is intended not merely to produce literate citizens but educated, secure, and empowered ones (Prasad, 2021). Education here has to be in a substantive sense; it has to equip young people with the ability to pass exams, but also to pioneer life (Cense, 2019). When young people are subjected to interpersonal interactions with emotional control, peer relations, or control over their bodies, they require more than science in books; they require means of knowing themselves and others (Zhurabekova, 2020). The omission of CSE from school education, thus, renders this right incomplete and ineffective in meeting the real developmental requirements of adolescents (Ramaswamy, 2021).

Besides, the constitutional interpretation of Article 21, which includes the right to life and liberty, has also undergone major changes. In *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017), the Supreme Court founded the right to privacy in Article 21, namely encompassing the right to make personal choices, bodily integrity, and individual identity.³ This acknowledgement necessarily entails that the citizen has to be given the consciousness and capability to exercise such

³*Justice KS Puttaswamy (Retd) v. Union of India & Ors.*, Supreme Court of India, 24 August 2017.

independence effectively. If the law recognises bodily integrity as a right, then the law must also recognise the obligation of the state to ensure the knowledge required to uphold and exercise that right from puberty onwards (Bublitz, 2022). CSE is the educational framework that makes bodily autonomy a reality and not rhetoric (Miedema, 2020).

Another complementary constitutional requirement is Article 51A(h), which defines the basic responsibility of all citizens to acquire a scientific temper and humanism (Pratham, 2020). This makes it necessary for the state to avoid educating children in fear, taboo, and silence regarding natural biological processes, emotional facts, or relational ethics (Lehn, 2025). Today, though, this is how sexuality is dealt with in India's classrooms: *euphemised, marginalised, or non-existent* (Jose, 2024). The failure to provide a scientific, secular, and rights-based foundation for CSE undermines the Constitution's promise to build rational, ethical, and well-informed citizens (Vincent, 2020).

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, enshrines Article 21A but does not tackle emotional, social, and reproductive literacy in any meaningful way (Khare, 2022). The Act's lack of mention of sexuality education is a testament to a limited and outdated view of what constitutes effective learning (Chaka, 2017). Its curriculum framework prioritises learning outcomes at the foundational level, without including provision for knowledge about consent, gender, online safety, mental health, or power issues (Bose, 2020). This results in piecemeal legislation state-wise, under which life skills courses are watered down or excluded altogether in the face of socio-political realities. It is therefore crucial to amend the RTE Act on curriculum development, with the inclusion of CSE as an explicit, mandatory aspect of school education (Astle, 2021).

Besides these constitutional mandates, India is also subject to several international legal commitments that give importance to the responsibility of providing CSE. Under the UN Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC), India must provide access to reliable, age-appropriate information regarding health, development, and well-being (Articles 13, 17, 24) (Desai, 2018).

To legislate CSE as a right would have symbolic and structural meaning. It would be symbolic of a change from viewing sexuality education as being

ancillary or experimental to viewing it as being central to protecting individual rights and public health (Lottes, 2013). It would force equal application throughout states, provide adequate teacher training, and protect CSE from political or ideological pendulum swings (Anderson, 2023). It would destigmatise these conversations by providing them with legal legitimacy within the national education and policy machinery.

In a nation that has constitutionalised the right to education, dignity, and personal liberty, withholding from adolescents structured and predictable information regarding their development is an abandonment of legal duty (McCowan, 2013). CSE is not a luxury, but a matter of pressing necessity, and one which should be safeguarded as a right under Indian law, which cannot be denied (Manoj D, 2025).

NEP 2020 as a Pathway

The NEP 2020 focuses on foundational life skills, ethical formation, and pedagogy for all, laying a rich canvas to institutionalise CSE in Indian schooling formally (Kirchhoff, 2021). Although the policy does not refer to CSE, its design is well-suited to introduce sexuality education through curricular and teacher training pathways (Mukau, 2025). NEP 2020 thus becomes not only a progressive idea but also a feasible means to provide age-appropriate, culture-specific, and competency-relevant CSE.

One of the strengths of NEP 2020 is its curricular adaptability and modular nature, specifically the change from learning in terms of content to competency-based skill acquisition. This creates space for CSE to be integrated without separating it as a distinct subject. Emotional well-being, respect for diversity, decision-making, and ethical online behaviour are all pillars of the NEP map that align with the objectives of an updated CSE curriculum. Alignment, not addition, is what is needed.

The Preparatory and Middle Stages are well-suited for incorporating CSE in current subjects like Environmental Studies, Moral Science, and Life Skills, with the emphasis on personal safety, body awareness, and empathy. In the Secondary Stage, CSE can be articulated as an optional or cross-listed module through Social Science, Health Education, or even Legal Studies, emphasising critical thinking, digital responsibility, and civic value (Lawrence, 2000).

To move from policy potential to practical implementation, three reform levels are essential:

- CSE needs to be region-specific and developmentally phased, rebranded under NEP as ‘Life Skills and Relationship Education’ and integrated into subjects and co-curriculars to minimise political and cultural resistance.
- Incorporate compulsory SCERT/NCERT-sponsored CSE certification online and offline with scenario-based pedagogy, emotional facilitation, and classroom management, providing both competence and institutional legitimacy.
- Utilising DIKSHA and NDEAR to provide decentralised CSE material peer videos, FAQs, teacher forums, and local stories, allowing discreet, culturally appropriate access, particularly to rural students (Naik, 2024).

Besides these, there is also a generational shift in the teaching body. Although older teachers might be reluctant to start such conversations, younger teachers, particularly those entering post-NEP, are already socialised towards freer, rights-based pedagogies. NEP’s progressive rhetoric gives them institutional space, yet their buy-in needs to be complemented with equipment, community, and coverage.

Above all, NEP’s articulation with Indian philosophies of life creates room for a values-driven re-narration of CSE. In the Arthashastra, Kamasutra, and the earlier Ayurvedic texts, sexuality was never severed from ethics, aesthetics, and statecraft (Bialystok, 2022). Through an appeal to this intellectual heritage, policymakers can re-narrate CSE not as a Western invention, but as the recovery of holistic Indian knowledge traditions upholding both cultural continuity and youth well-being.

To this extent, NEP 2020 is not just a background document but a ready policy framework. Placing CSE as a life skill, if done with foresight, can make NEP’s vision operational in concrete terms: creating learners who are not only literate and employable but also emotionally capable, socially considerate, and legally enlightened.

Conclusion

CSE in India needs to be repositioned not as a pedagogical debate, but as a constitutional obligation and a developmental need. The provision of CSE is protected against temporary political changes and cultural opposition by being reframed as a constitutional obligation, which places it inside the legally binding framework of fundamental rights. Such acknowledgement would bring India's domestic responsibilities into line with its international commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which emphasise the need to provide adolescents with a thorough, rights-based education.

Fundamentally, CSE is not about teaching sexual information in isolation; it is about instilling respect, emotional intelligence, body autonomy, and an abiding appreciation for human relationships. In this sense, it is not different from the basic rights guaranteed in the Indian Constitution: the right to life, to education, to privacy, and dignity.

The way forward requires three converging recognitions: *legal recognition, curricular integration, and systemic implementation*. One, CSE has to be recognised as a constitutional right built into the Right to Education under Article 21A and reinforced by judicial understandings of privacy and autonomy under Article 21. Two, it has to be recognised as a curricular requirement, not optional or subject to ideological veto. As in the case of literacy or numeracy, emotional literacy and ethical decision-making need to be explicitly taught and reinforced at all stages of education. And third, it needs to be contextualised as a public health intervention critical in alleviating adolescent pregnancies, preventing abuse, countering misinformation, and promoting mental well-being.

Notably, the institutional ingredients for this shift are present already. India possesses strong legal foundations, visionary policy blueprints in the NEP 2020, and an increasing coalition of educators, health workers, and civil society activists who are dedicated to adolescent development. What is lacking is not infrastructure, but alignment, a shared language, effective leadership, and policy legitimacy that ties the law, classroom practice, and community discourse together. Without normalised public discourse and state-supported safeguards, CSE will continue to be patchy and subject to backlash. A pragmatic

track demands sequential rollout; pilot programs in sample districts, scaling up through SCERTs and NCERT, infusing CSE pedagogy in teacher education courses, and creating a national monitoring and evaluation system. Education budget earmarks, in addition to digital dissemination policies, can guarantee access across India's socio-economic and linguistic diversity. Institutionalising it will convert CSE from a disputed initiative into an enduring public good.

We conclude, "*we learned how to make kids read and write; now we need to learn how to make them feel, relate, and respect.*" Anything else would be a shame to their emotional, legal, and civic future that we supposedly help prepare them for. Thus, the requirement is not just educational but also civilizational; to empower India's youth with the knowledge and abilities necessary to regulate their emotions, respect their bodies, and establish relationships founded on dignity and consent. CSE must be given top priority in India's public health, curriculum, and constitution if the country is to turn its demographic dividend into a democratic dividend. And, to create a resilient, just society, comprehensive, rights-based, and culturally appropriate sexuality education must be implemented.

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