

Fundamentos para el diseño de una estrategia socioeducativa para la educación sexual en secundaria básica

Theoretical and methodological foundations for the design of a socio-educational strategy for sexuality education in lower secondary education

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Received: Abril 02, 2026

Revised: Abril 22, 2026

Accepted: May 20, 2026

RESUMEN: La investigación tiene como objetivo exponer algunos fundamentos teórico-metodológicos para el diseño de una estrategia socioeducativa que permita mejorar la calidad de la educación sexual en estudiantes de secundaria básica en el municipio Caborca, México. Los resultados se derivan de una tesis previamente defendida. Se empleó el enfoque mixto o combinado al integrar de forma holística las partes de diferentes métodos de investigación tanto cualitativo como cuantitativo que permitió comprender el fenómeno estudiado de una manera más completa con la respectiva parametrización de los instrumentos aplicados y la valoración de la información obtenida de la aplicación de los mismos.

Palabras clave: Educación sexual; Estrategia socioeducativa; Secundaria básica

ABSTRACT: This study aims to present several theoretical and methodological foundations for the design of a socio-educational strategy aimed at improving the quality of sexuality education among lower secondary school students in the municipality of Caborca, Mexico. The findings are derived from a previously defended thesis. A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating qualitative and quantitative research methods in a holistic manner to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. This approach included the appropriate parameterization of the research instruments and the assessment of the information obtained through their application.

Keywords: Sexuality education; Socio-educational strategy; Lower secondary education

Introduction

The education of human beings as social beings, viewed from its different dimensions (multifaceted and from a holistic and comprehensive perspective), has given sexuality education an important place, since this process is related to human reproduction, the family, and the individual's personal life.

For this reason, this process has become a central articulating component in the different curricula developed and implemented at educational levels in many education systems worldwide, and Mexico is no exception.

Published statistical data show that the onset of sexual activity is occurring at increasingly younger ages in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The proposal presented in this article addresses the question of how to contribute to the development of sexuality education among second-year lower secondary school students in the municipality of Caborca, Mexico, as the scientific problem.

Its objective is to present the main theoretical and methodological foundations for the design of a socio-educational strategy for sexuality education among second-year students at “Coronel José María Girón” Lower Secondary School, located in the aforementioned Mexican municipality.

Development

Sexuality education has been studied by authors and researchers belonging to several branches of science.

In general terms, this concept has been referred to as information intentionally provided to children, adolescents, and young people concerning certain aspects of genital sexuality.

Thus, sexuality education takes different forms at each stage of life.

For example, in young children, its essential content is limited to information about where children come from, how they originate, and other important aspects.

In the specific case of adolescents and young people, the information focuses on the anatomy and physiology of the different reproductive systems, the risks associated with sexual intercourse, how to prevent these risks, and so forth.

In this regard, it is important to point out that, from the perspective of common sense, sexuality education is “adult-centered” because it focuses on genitality, leaving aside other elements of sexuality that pass through the prism of other needs according to the life stages of children, adolescents, and young people.

Historically, sexuality has been a topic permeated by negative attitudes, prejudices, beliefs, and values.

This has resulted in the emergence of erroneous concepts over time, which contribute to the persistence of different problems that ultimately cause social and personal suffering, such as poor coexistence, gender-based violence, low self-esteem, limited awareness in decision-making, lack of respect and responsibility, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual abuse, unintended pregnancies, among others.

The foregoing contributes to understanding the importance of sexuality education in increasing self-knowledge and helping people improve interpersonal relationships and decision-making (Font, 1999, *Breve historia de los conceptos de sexo y género*, p. 42).

Sexuality Education at the Lower Secondary Level in Mexico

Sexuality education in Mexico has been incorporated into curricula with the aim of providing adolescents with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to make informed and responsible decisions about their sexuality.

The new Study Plan recognizes the need to transform the curriculum in order to eradicate sexist, colonial, racist, and discriminatory behaviors rooted in society (Gobierno de México. Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2022).

However, studies have indicated that sexuality education at the lower secondary level focuses predominantly on risk prevention, leaving aside aspects related to pleasure, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. This suggests the need for more comprehensive sexuality education that encompasses all dimensions of human sexuality (Heredia & Rodríguez, 2021).

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a process supported by a curriculum designed to address the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. Its purpose is to provide children and adolescents with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable them to enjoy health, well-being, and dignity; establish respectful social and sexual relationships; understand how

their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and know their rights and safeguard their protection throughout their lives (UNESCO, n.d.).

The probability of adolescent pregnancy increases in poor, low-educational-attainment, and rural communities. In many countries, this problem is widespread; many adolescent girls are forced to marry. In low-income countries, more than 30% of adolescent girls marry before the age of 18, and approximately 14% before the age of 15 (World Health Organization (WHO), 2012).

Many young people do not know how to prevent pregnancy because sexuality education is unavailable in many countries. Many young women feel embarrassed when requesting contraceptive services; they may lack sufficient financial resources to access them or such services may be scarce.

Even though access to different contraceptive methods is currently easier, sexually active adolescents are less likely to use them than adult women. Young women may be unable to refuse unwanted sexual intercourse or oppose forced sexual relations, which are often unprotected (WHO, 2012).

In Mexico, young people are beginning sexual practices at increasingly younger ages. Twenty-three percent of adolescents begin their sexual lives between 12 and 19 years of age, with a fertility rate of 77 births per 1,000 adolescents aged 15 to 19.

According to figures from the National Population Council (CONAPO, 2021), the average age at sexual debut is 15.5 years, while the National Institute of Perinatology reports an average of 14.6 years. Among those who have initiated sexual activity, the majority (97%) know at least one contraceptive method; however, more than half did not use any method during their first sexual intercourse.

Premature childbearing increases risks for both mothers and newborns, and adolescent pregnancies involve additional health risks for both. Adolescent girls frequently do not receive prenatal care in a timely manner, which can lead to subsequent problems. Mexico ranks first in adolescent pregnancy among OECD member countries (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), 2021).

Another consequence is that many adolescents who become pregnant are forced to leave school. An adolescent with little or no education has fewer skills and opportunities to find employment. Malnutrition, premature births, children with developmental disorders and malformations, and a

50% higher probability of death during the first weeks of life are among the consequences that a premature and unintended pregnancy may entail (Zambrano & Vera, 2016).

In the case of males, although the consequences are not health-related or physical, their responsibility in the pregnancy is essential, since a large part of the economic responsibility falls on them. In these cases, school dropout increases because the male partner must work and commonly leaves school to provide a quality life for his family.

In Mexico, the autonomy of the State with respect to religion has been established since the nineteenth century. Secular education has been recognized as a constitutional principle since 1917, and sexuality education content has been progressively developed since 1974 in response to health and population challenges, as well as in compliance with international human rights commitments.

These advances occurred amid tensions among various actors, including representatives of the Catholic hierarchy who sought to preserve a Judeo-Christian sexual order, and those adopting secular positions. The first confrontation regarding public policy occurred between 1932 and 1934 in Mexico City, and another took place between 2006 and 2008, before the fieldwork for the study.

Currently, the content of the lower secondary school subject Science 1, in force since 2007, addresses topics such as the dimensions of sexuality, reproduction, physical changes during adolescence, prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, as well as other issues that at the time generated controversy: the initiation of sexual relations, masturbation as a healthy practice, sexual rights, condom use, and emergency contraception (Díaz, 2022).

Sexuality Education as an Articulating Component of the Lower Secondary Curriculum in Mexico

The New Mexican School (NEM) proposes an educational approach that integrates articulating components into the curriculum, addressing socially relevant topics transversally across educational levels. One of these components is health education, which includes comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) as an essential component of students' holistic development. Matos *et al.* (2024)

Articulating Components in the New Mexican School

The articulating components in the NEM are cross-cutting themes addressed across different formative fields and educational levels, with the aim of connecting school learning with students'

social and community realities. These components seek to promote contextualized and meaningful education, encouraging critical reflection and transformative action among learners.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education within the NEM Framework

Comprehensive sexuality education is addressed in the NEM within the articulating component “Healthy Living.”

This approach seeks to help students understand the relationships between the environment and the social, economic, and cultural dynamics of their communities, as well as the consequences for individual and collective health.

CSE focuses on providing scientific information and promoting socio-emotional skills that enable adolescents to exercise their sexuality freely, responsibly, and in a healthy manner (Subsecretaría de Educación Media Superior, 2022).

Sexuality education at the secondary level is often limited by insufficient teacher preparation and training to address issues related to sexuality. This lack may lead students to seek information from unreliable sources, increasing the risk of risky sexual behaviors (Morales, 2022).

Research Methodology

The present proposal aims to promote comprehensive sexuality education among second-year lower secondary school students, with the purpose of preventing unplanned pregnancies and promoting healthy and responsible relationships. The methodology seeks to foster open dialogue, empathy, and peaceful conflict resolution, addressing sexuality-related topics constructively.

Different scientific research methods were employed, including documentary research, a survey, and statistical-mathematical methods.

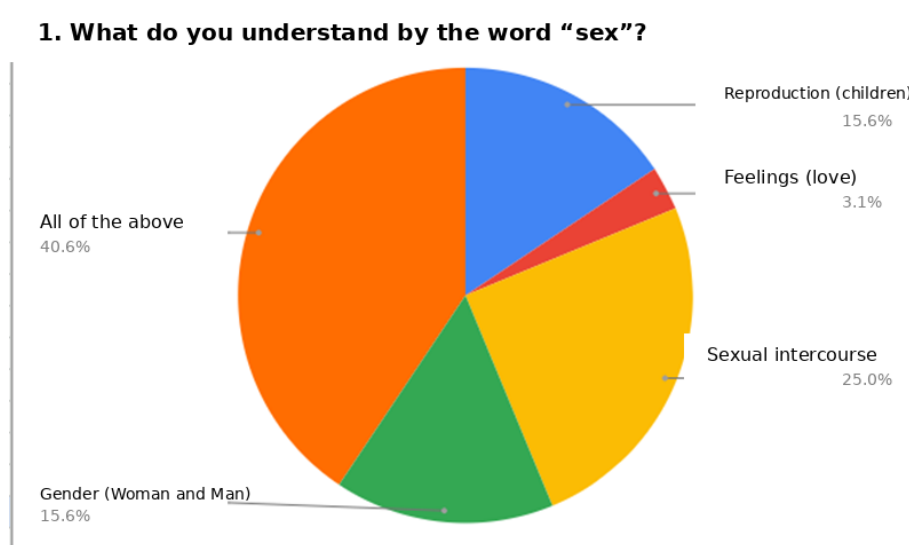
The initial survey administered to students in order to identify elements related to the sexuality education they had received yielded the following results:

Question 1 concerned the meaning of the word sex. A total of 15.6% selected the first option (Reproduction [children]), and 3.1% indicated Feelings (love).

Twenty-five percent of respondents selected Sexual intercourse (pleasure), while 16.6% referred to Gender (Woman and Man). However, 40.6% included all of the above variants (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Results of the first question of the diagnostic survey administered.



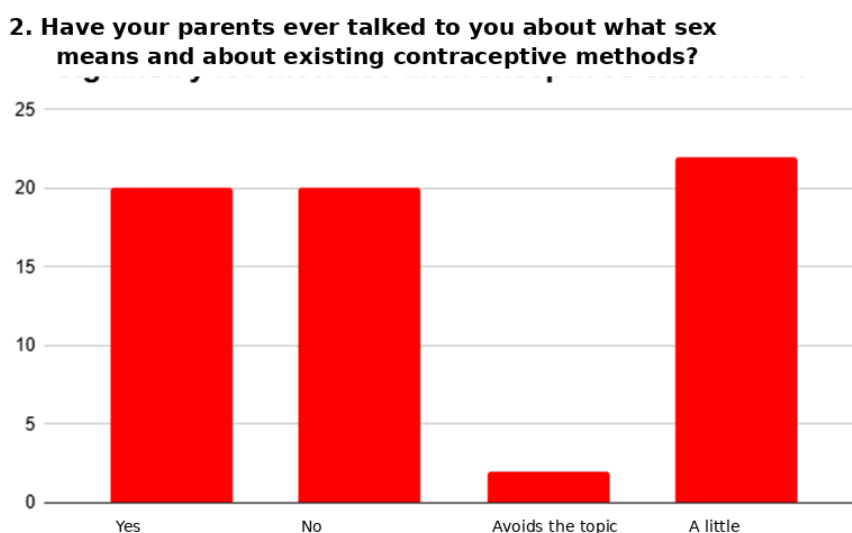
Source: Authors' own elaboration

Question 2 of the diagnostic survey concerned whether either parent had ever talked about what sex means, as well as existing contraceptive methods.

Regarding this issue, 20% selected Yes, 20% selected No, 21% responded Very few times, and 0.3% indicated that parents avoid discussing the topic (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.

Results of question 2 of the diagnostic survey.



Source: Authors' own elaboration

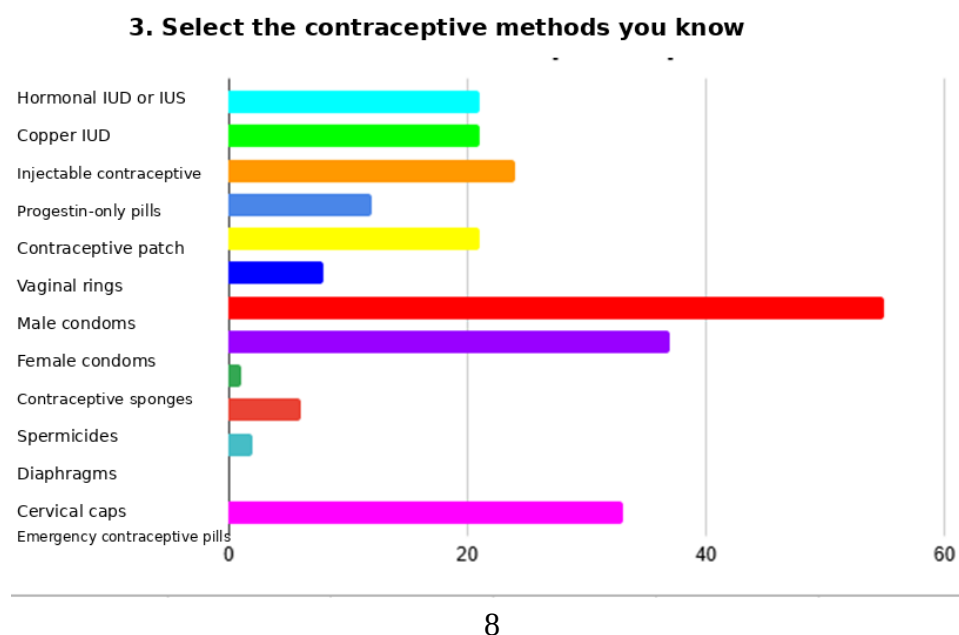
Question 3 sought to determine students' knowledge of the different types of contraceptives available. The following were listed:

- Hormonal IUD or IUS
- Copper IUD
- Injectable contraceptive
- Progestin-only pills
- Contraceptive patch
- Vaginal rings
- Male condoms
- Female condoms
- Contraceptive sponges
- Spermicides: spermicides can destroy sperm
- Diaphragms
- Cervical caps
- Emergency contraceptive pills

Among the above, male condoms, female condoms, and contraceptive pills received the highest scores. Contraceptive sponges, diaphragms, and cervical caps received lower scores (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.

Results of question 3 of the diagnostic survey concerning students' knowledge of the different existing contraceptive methods.



Source: Authors' own elaboration

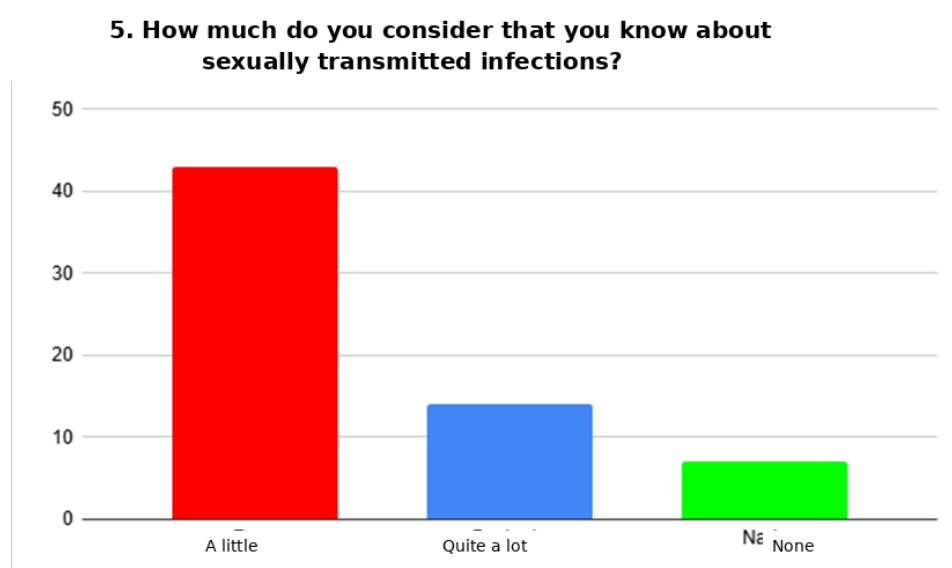
When investigating the information students had received from school about sexuality-related topics (Question 4), nearly 50% reported Yes, while fewer than 10% reported No or Very little.

Question 5 concerned the level of knowledge students believed they had regarding different sexually transmitted infections.

Figure 4 presents the results obtained.

Figure 4.

Level of knowledge students believe they have regarding different sexually transmitted infections.



Source: Authors' own elaboration

In question 6, students were asked to indicate from whom they receive or had received information about sexually transmitted infections.

The following options were provided:

- Friends (14.1%)
- Family members or relatives (3.1%)
- Parents (10.9%)
- Teachers (35.9%)
- Internet (26.6%)
- I do not have this information (9.4%)

Regarding knowledge of the consequences of becoming pregnant at an early age, 50% of respondents answered yes.

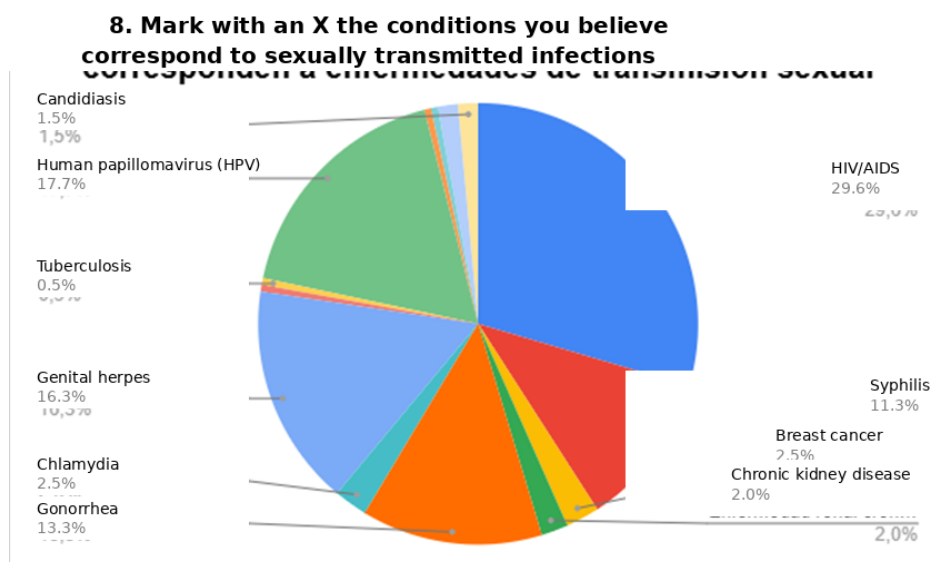
In the final question, students had to select from several options which conditions corresponded to sexually transmitted infections.

- HIV/AIDS
- Syphilis
- Breast cancer
- Chronic kidney disease
- Gonorrhea
- Chlamydia
- Genital herpes
- COVID-19
- Tuberculosis
- Human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Type 2 diabetes mellitus
- Arterial hypertension
- Hepatitis B
- Trichomoniasis
- Candidiasis

Figure 5 shows the results for this final aspect.

Figure 5.

Results of question 8 of the survey administered to students.



Source: Authors' own elaboration

Principles of Sexuality Education

According to the results obtained in the present research, it is important to emphasize that the design of a socio-educational strategy to improve the quality of sexuality education among students should take into account not only the theoretical foundations but also the results of the initial diagnostic assessment, so that the strategy responds to both the individual and collective needs of the students for whom it is intended.

Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the fundamental principles that govern this process.

There are many principles that guide the process of sexuality education, including the conceptions of González-Hernández (2013) and Turriaga (2021), among others.

In this study, the fundamental principles of sexuality education proposed by González-Hernández (2013, p. 81) are adopted. They are:

1. Principle of comprehensiveness, or the systemic and holistic nature of education.
2. Principle of adapting education to the needs, demands, and expectations of individuals, the groups involved, and their social context.
3. Principle of centralization and decentralization of curriculum design and development processes.
4. Principle of inter- and cross-sectoral collaboration and the establishment of social networks.
5. Principle of coeducation and gender equity.
6. Principle of diversity, unity, and equity.

7. Principle of respect for and exercise of universal, sexual, and reproductive human rights.
8. Principle of multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and interdisciplinarity.
9. Principle of linking study, teaching, and extracurricular activities with life and work activities.
10. Principle of awareness-raising, training, and committed participation of the group responsible for educational processes.

The theoretical and methodological elements discussed will enable the design of a socio-educational strategy to improve the quality of sexuality education at the lower secondary level, always starting from the diagnosis of the students to whom it is directed, as well as their family and community contexts in which they develop.

Conclusions

A socio-educational strategy for sexuality education among lower secondary school students should be based on theoretical and methodological foundations in order to achieve the expected effectiveness.

It is important to take into account the results of the initial diagnostic assessment concerning the current situation of lower secondary school students with respect to the topic under study when designing this strategy.

The socio-educational strategy should include actions not only for students but also for families in general.

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