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Sexual Education among Students in Higher Learning Institutions: A Case of Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania

Chesko Tweve, Shadrack Mwakalinga*, Peter Mwamwaja

Catholic University of Mbeya, United Republic of Tanzania

***Correspondence to:** Shadrack Mwakalinga, Catholic University of Mbeya, United Republic of Tanzania; Email: shadrack.mwakalinga@cuom.ac.tz

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Abstract: This study explored the perceptions of students and lecturers regarding sexual education in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. A mixed-methods research design was employed. Quantitative data were collected using questionnaires administered to students, while qualitative data were gathered through interviews and focus group discussions with lecturers and administrators. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including percentages and charts, whereas qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed a high level of awareness of sexual education among respondents; however, formal provision within institutions was largely inadequate, inconsistent, or unclear. Sexual activity and unintended pregnancies were found to be most prevalent during the early years of university study, particularly in the first year. Respondents acknowledged the importance of sexual education in promoting responsible behaviour, reducing sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies, and enhancing academic performance. The absence of structured sexual education resulted in reliance on informal sources, limited open discussion, and increased exposure to risky sexual behaviours. The study concludes that Tanzanian higher learning institutions need to consider including sexual education courses in their curriculum. These findings underscore the urgent need for institutionally supported, curriculum-based sexual education to promote students' health, well-being, and academic success.

Keywords: Sexual education; Students; Higher learning; Institutions; Tanzania

1. Background to the Study

Most students enrolled in higher learning institutions in Tanzania are in their adolescent or late adolescent stage. The

adolescent stage is a critical developmental period marked by profound biological, emotional, and social transformations (Erikson, 1968; Arnett, 2024). During this stage, young adults experience increased



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curiosity about sexual drives and relationships, identity exploration, and the need for social acceptance. These developmental changes often intersect with newfound independence, peer influence, and exposure to diverse sociocultural and technological environments that shape attitudes and behaviours toward sexuality (UNESCO, 2023). Despite this, sexual education programs in many Tanzanian higher learning institutions remain limited, inconsistent, or absent (Mhando & Mtiti, 2024; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2023).

The absence of comprehensive and structured sexual education can expose university students to risky sexual behaviours, including unprotected sex, multiple partnerships, and transactional sex—factors contributing to unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 2024; Mkumbo & Kato, 2023). These issues not only affect students' health but also have broader implications for academic performance, dropout rates, and psychosocial well-being (Kamala, 2023).

Comprehensive sexual education is, therefore, essential for equipping young people with accurate knowledge, positive attitudes, and life skills necessary for making informed decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health. It fosters responsible behaviour, enhances gender equality, and promotes respect and consent in relationships (UNFPA, 2024; UNESCO, 2023). Furthermore, effective sexual education contributes to academic focus and retention by reducing incidences of early pregnancies and related disruptions in education (WHO, 2024). Understanding how students and lecturers perceive sexual education is vital for designing contextually relevant programs that address real-life challenges faced by university communities. Such programs should integrate cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and evidence-based approaches to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability in Tanzanian higher learning institutions (Nyoni & Mwaipopo, 2024).

2. Statement of the Problem

Although sexual education has received substantial attention at the primary and secondary levels in Tanzania, its implementation and relevance in higher learning institutions remain under-researched and inconsistently applied. Surveys and qualitative studies

report that many university students enrol with limited, incomplete, or incorrect knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, and that campus-based sexual health information-seeking is fragmented (e.g., student-led initiatives, ad-hoc clinics, peer networks) rather than delivered through consistent, institution-wide programmes (Kachota and Kassimu, 2024). Many Tanzanian universities lack formal, curriculum-based sexual education tailored to the specific needs of late adolescents and young adults, leaving gaps in knowledge about contraception, consent, gender-based violence, and STI prevention (Ngissa, N. S., et al. 2024).

The absence of systematic sexual education in higher education is associated with identifiable risks. Several Tanzania-focused and regional studies report rising concerns about unintended pregnancies among university students, negative psychosocial effects for affected students, and continued vulnerability to HIV and other STIs—outcomes that undermine students' health, academic progress, and retention (Mafie, 2023). National statistics and sector reports also highlight that the majority of university entrants are adolescents or young adults, a group for whom evidence-based, developmentally appropriate sexuality education is especially important (TCU, 2023).

Global and regional guidance stresses that comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for older adolescents and young adults reduces risky behaviours and supports wellbeing when it is age-appropriate, evidence-based, and linked to youth-friendly services—yet adaptation of these frameworks to the university context in Tanzania is still limited (UNESCO, 2024). In response, recent campus-level research in Tanzania (e.g., information-seeking studies and small-scale programme evaluations) has called for institutional policies that mainstream sexual and reproductive health education—integrating curricula, counselling services, and referral pathways—to address student needs and mitigate negative academic and social consequences (Kachota and Kassimu, 2024).

3. Objectives of the Study

General Objective:

To explore perceptions and the importance of sexual education among students and lecturers in higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

Specific Objectives:

To examine the perceptions of students and lecturers regarding sexual education in higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

To outline the importance of sexual education to students in higher learning institutions.

To identify challenges associated with the lack of sexual education among students in higher learning institutions.

To propose strategies for effectively addressing sexual education issues in higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

4. Research Questions

What are the perceptions of students and lecturers toward sexual education in higher learning institutions?

What is the importance of sexual education to students in higher learning institutions?

What challenges arise due to the lack of sexual education in higher learning institutions?

What strategies can be employed to improve sexual education among university students in Tanzania?

5. Significance of the Study

The study generated context-specific empirical evidence about how both students and lecturers perceive sexual education in Tanzanian higher learning institutions, filling a gap in research that has focused far more on primary and secondary schooling than on university contexts (Ngissa et al., 2024; CPIA Tanzania, 2024). By documenting attitudes, perceived needs, and preferred delivery approaches, the research can directly inform institutional policy and curriculum development—helping universities design age-appropriate, campus-relevant sexual and reproductive health (SRH) modules, counselling services, and referral pathways (UNESCO, 2024; WHO, 2023). Evidence from program evaluations and systematic reviews shows that high-quality, contextually adapted sexuality education improves knowledge, reduces risky behaviours, and supports healthier relationships—outcomes linked to better mental health and greater capacity for academic focus and persistence (Kim et al., 2023; Mukanga et al., 2024).

Beyond academic policy, the study will raise awareness among university administrators, student support services, and other educational stakeholders about the central role sexual education plays in

promoting responsible behaviour, gender equity, and overall student well-being—strengthening the case for investing in campus SRH services and staff training (UNFPA Tanzania, 2024; CPIA Tanzania, 2024). Finally, the findings will be valuable to health educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers working both within Tanzania and in similar low- and middle-income settings by offering actionable recommendations for integrating comprehensive, evidence-based SRH education into higher education—aligned with international guidance on CSE and youth-friendly services (UNESCO, 2024; WHO, 2023).

6. Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The study focused on selected higher learning institutions in Tanzania, encompassing both public and private universities, to capture variations in institutional culture, policy implementation, and student demographics (Tanzania Commission for Universities [TCU], 2024). Including multiple universities has provided a broader understanding of how sexual education is perceived and addressed within different educational contexts. The focus on higher learning institutions is crucial because university campuses are spaces where young adults transition toward independence, often engaging in new social and sexual relationships while facing limited institutional guidance on sexual and reproductive health (Ngissa et al., 2024; Mhando & Mtiti, 2024).

The study involved both students and lecturers to obtain balanced perspectives on sexual education. Students, as primary beneficiaries of sexual education programs, provide insight into their lived experiences, knowledge gaps, and behavioural responses (Mkumbo & Kato, 2023). Lecturers, on the other hand, play a critical role as educators and mentors whose attitudes, comfort levels, and pedagogical competence influence how sexuality-related topics are approached in academic settings (Nyoni & Mwaipopo, 2024; UNESCO, 2023). Including both groups ensures a holistic understanding of institutional readiness and the socio-cultural barriers affecting sexual education delivery.

The scope of the study has been limited to examining perceptions, perceived importance, challenges, and proposed solutions regarding sexual education in Tanzanian higher learning institutions. It has not explored medical or clinical dimensions of sexuality, such as diagnosis, treatment, or biological functions,

as the primary aim is to understand educational, behavioural, and institutional perspectives (WHO, 2024). This approach aligns with previous educational research that emphasises the psychosocial, cognitive, and policy-related aspects of sexuality education, rather than biomedical interventions (UNFPA, 2024; MoEST, 2023). By focusing on educational perceptions and contextual barriers, the study will contribute evidence relevant for curriculum design, campus policy development, and stakeholder engagement in promoting comprehensive sexual education within university settings in Tanzania.

7. Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was adopted, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of perceptions, importance, challenges, and possible solutions related to sexual education in Tanzanian higher learning institutions. The rationale for using mixed methods lies in its ability to capture the breadth and depth of a phenomenon — quantifying patterns through surveys while also exploring participants' experiences and perspectives in detail through interviews and focus group discussions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023; Almalki, 2016). This methodological pluralism allows the researcher to triangulate data, increase validity, and offset the weaknesses inherent in using either approach alone (Creswell & Creswell, 2024).

Mixed methods are particularly suitable for education and social science studies where human attitudes, behaviours, and institutional contexts intersect (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2023). In this study, the quantitative component gathered statistical information on participants' awareness, attitudes, and exposure to sexual education programs, while the qualitative component generated descriptive insights into how these perceptions are shaped by cultural, institutional, and personal factors (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2023). Such an integrated approach enhances the interpretive power of the findings and aligns with current best practices in educational and behavioural research within sub-Saharan African contexts (Mhando & Mtiti, 2024).

7.1 Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of both students (41)

and lecturers 10 drawn from selected higher learning institutions in Tanzania. Involving both groups is critical to obtaining a balanced understanding of the issues, as students represent the primary beneficiaries of sexual education, while lecturers serve as key implementers and opinion leaders in curriculum and policy discussions (Nyoni & Mwaipopo, 2024; Mkumbo & Kato, 2023).

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure equitable representation across faculties, gender, and academic levels. This technique allows the researcher to divide the population into homogeneous subgroups (strata) and randomly select participants from each stratum, thereby improving representativeness and reducing sampling bias (Etikan & Bala, 2023). Stratified random sampling has been widely recommended in educational research where the population is diverse and where gender, academic discipline, and institutional type may influence perceptions (Cohen et al., 2023; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023).

This sampling strategy is also consistent with prior Tanzanian educational studies examining attitudes and perceptions, as it allows for meaningful comparisons between subgroups while ensuring inclusivity (Ngissa et al., 2024). The sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for populations larger than 1,000, adjusted to reflect expected response rates in higher education contexts (MoEST, 2023).

7.2 Data Collection Methods

To ensure comprehensive and credible findings, the study employed multiple data collection methods forty one questionnaires, fifteen interviews, and five focus group discussions (FGDs). The combination of these techniques aligns with the mixed-methods approach, enhancing the validity and reliability of the data through methodological triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2002).

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from forty-one (41) students across selected higher learning institutions. Questionnaires are widely recognised for their efficiency in obtaining quantitative data from geographically dispersed populations and for enabling statistical analysis of trends, relationships, and differences (Creswell & Creswell, 2024; Almalki, 2016). In this study, the questionnaire consisted of

both closed-ended and Likert-scale items designed to measure students' awareness and perceptions regarding sexual education. Such tools have been successfully employed in recent educational and public health studies in Tanzania to assess youth knowledge and behaviours related to sexuality and reproductive health (Mhando & Mtiti, 2024; Ngissa et al., 2024). Pre-testing (pilot study) was conducted to ensure clarity, reliability, and contextual appropriateness of the questionnaire items (Etikan & Bala, 2023).

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with ten lecturers, and five university administrators. This approach allowed flexibility in questioning while maintaining focus on key research objectives, facilitating a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and reasoning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2023). Interviews are particularly useful for exploring sensitive or value-laden topics such as sexuality, where participants provided richer responses in one-on-one settings (Foster et al, 2021). Recent Tanzanian research on sexual and reproductive health education also highlights the usefulness of interviews in capturing educators' beliefs and institutional constraints that may not emerge in survey data (Nyoni & Mwaipopo, 2024; Mkumbo & Kato, 2023).

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Five Focus Group Discussions each comprising five members were used to explore shared perceptions, social norms, and attitudes among students concerning sexual education and campus experiences. FGDs are valuable in qualitative inquiry for generating interactive discussions, uncovering collective meanings, and revealing the social dynamics that shape behaviour (Krueger & Casey, 2024; Morgan, 2023). Each FGD comprised 6–10 students stratified by gender and academic level to encourage open participation and ensure diverse perspectives (Cohen et al., 2023). In the Tanzanian higher education context, FGDs have proven effective in eliciting honest and contextually grounded views on sensitive youth issues such as gender relations, sexual behaviour, and peer influence (Mhando & Mtiti, 2024). All discussions were recorded (with consent), transcribed, and thematically analysed to complement quantitative findings and provide a deeper interpretive understanding of the data (Johnson et al, 2023).

7.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, such as charts and percentages, to effectively summarise and interpret participants' responses. These statistical tools enable researchers to identify trends, patterns, and general perceptions within the population studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Descriptive analysis provides a clear understanding of the extent to which participants agree or disagree with various aspects of sexual education and helps to quantify perceptions across different demographic groups (Saunders et al., 2024; Mugenda, 2023).

Qualitative data, on the other hand, were analysed thematically to capture the depth and complexity of participants' perspectives. This process involves transcribing interview and focus group recordings, coding responses, and identifying emerging themes that align with the research objectives (Johnson et al, 202). Thematic analysis is particularly valuable in exploring nuanced attitudes and beliefs about sexual education, allowing the researcher to interpret underlying meanings in participants' narratives (Nowell et al., 2023). Triangulation of data sources was employed to enhance the validity and credibility of the findings by comparing quantitative trends with qualitative insights (Fetters & Molina-Azorin, 2023).

This combined analytical approach ensures a holistic understanding of students' and lecturers' perceptions of sexual education in Tanzanian higher learning institutions, supporting the development of informed, contextually relevant educational interventions.

8. Limitations of the study

The study used a small sample size, which limits generalisation, yet it illuminates the importance of sexual education as an important component in higher learning institutions. This is because most of the Tanzanian undergraduate students are at the age of adolescence or late adolescence, thus they are affected by a lack of proper knowledge of sexual education.

9. Findings

9.1 Perceptions of students and lecturers regarding sexual education in higher learning institutions in Tanzania

The questionnaire results from **Figure 1** revealed that 91.4% of respondents were aware of sexual

education, while 5.7% were neutral, and 2.9% reported that they were not aware of sexual education. The high level of awareness (91.4%) suggests that sexual education as a concept is widely known among students and lecturers in higher learning institutions. However, awareness alone does not guarantee adequate knowledge, responsible behaviour, or access to accurate information. The presence of neutral and unaware respondents, though small, indicates gaps in consistent exposure to sexual education.

Surprisingly, it was noted in the interview that the majority of the learners hear about sexual education, but they do not understand what it is exactly.

Respondents said:

Sexual education is just hearsay, but the majority are ignorant of proper sexual education, and peer pressure from fellow students makes them practice sexual activities without taking important precautions (Interview R Nov 2025).

Newness to university life contributes to thinking of having a partner and a new life. This is contributed to by sexual drives... (Interview T Nov 2025).

The responses from the interviews underscore the importance of providing sexual education to university students.

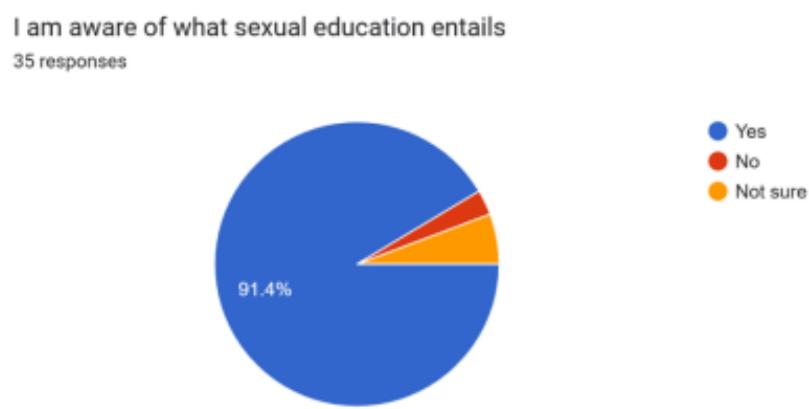


Figure 1: Awareness on sexual education

In relation to sexual engagement patterns (Figure 2) among male students, the findings showed that: 38.2% reported engagement in sexual relationships during the first year, 29.4% throughout all years of study, 20.6%

during the second and third years, 5.9% during the third year only, 2.9% during the first and second years, and 2.9% during the first and second years combined.

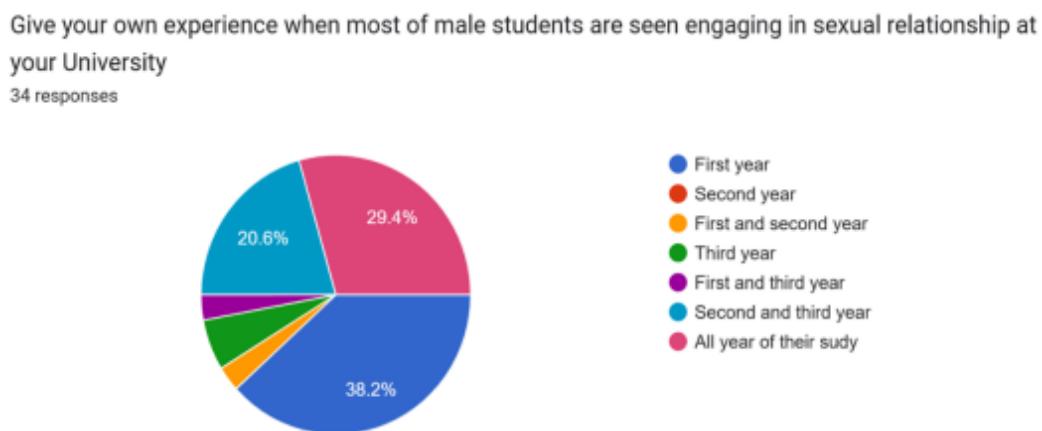


Figure 2: Male students engagement in sexual education

The data on sexual engagement patterns reveal that the first year of university is a critical period, with

the highest proportion of male students engaging in sexual relationships. This trend may be associated

with increased independence, freedom from parental supervision, peer influence, and exposure to new social environments. Continued engagement across all years also suggests that sexual activity is a sustained aspect of student life rather than a temporary phase.

These findings imply that while awareness of sexual education is high, students may enter university without adequate preparation to manage sexual and reproductive health challenges responsibly. The prominence of sexual activity in the first year underscores the need for early intervention, particularly

during orientation programs. Without structured sexual education, students may rely on peers or unreliable sources, increasing the risk of unsafe sexual practices.

9.2 Importance of sexual education

From the findings with reference to **Figure 3**, it was found that 85.3% of participants acknowledged the importance of sexual education for university students, even though it is not officially provided in most institutions. Meanwhile, 11.2% disagreed, and 3.5% were undecided.

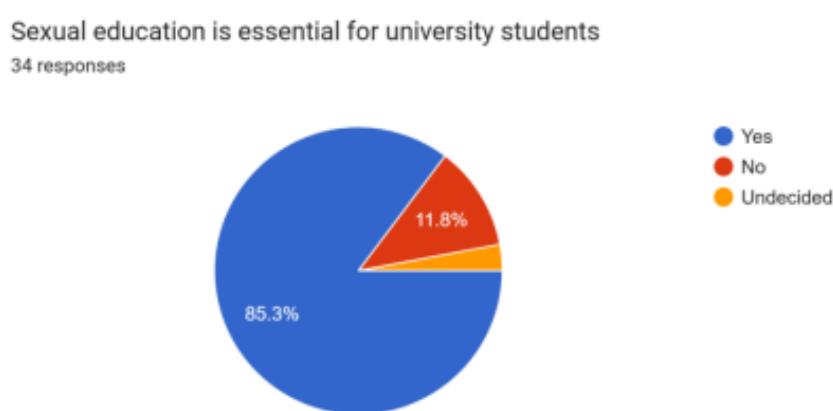


Figure 3: Sexual education to University students

The strong recognition of the importance of sexual education contrasts sharply with uncertainty about whether institutions actually provide it. The large proportion of respondents who were unsure (38.2%) suggests that sexual education, where present, may be informal, inconsistent, or poorly communicated. This ambiguity raises concerns about the reliability and accuracy of the information students receive. Regarding the institutional provision of sexual education, in **Figure 4**, 32.4% agreed that their institutions provide

sexual education, 38.2% were not sure, and 29.2% disagreed

The findings indicate a disconnect between students' needs and institutional practice. While students value sexual education, its absence from formal curricula creates confusion and limits access to standardised, evidence-based information. This situation may perpetuate misinformation and unequal access to sexual and reproductive health knowledge across institutions.

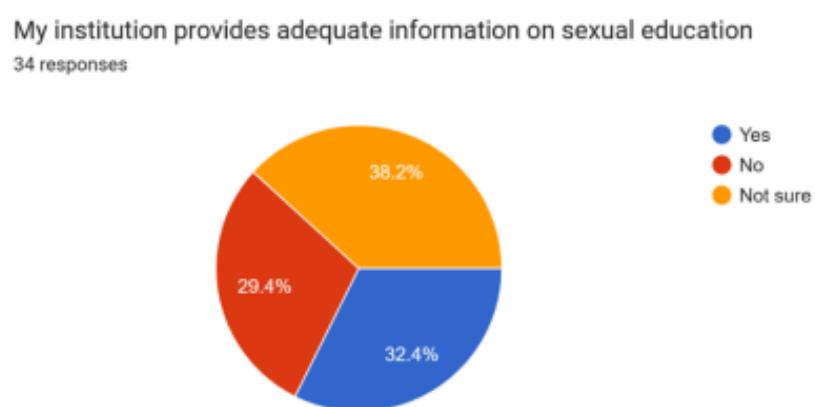


Figure 4: Provision of sexual education

9.3 Respondents' opinions about sexual education

In the field questionnaires, 93.9% agreed that sexual education promotes responsible behaviour, 100% agreed it should focus on moral and health aspects, 97.1% agreed that it enhances academic performance and discipline, 97.1% agreed it reduces unwanted pregnancies and STIs, 100% agreed it promotes self-respect and respect for others.

Refer to **Figures 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9**, respectively.

In the interview, respondents showed that sexual education is also important to university students, as it will increase awareness and help them make the right choice for the best sexual practice. Below are the anchor examples:

Sexual education will help students to be aware of sexual relations, reduce various sexually transmitted diseases, increase knowledge among young people, and produce young people with values. It will also give students a choice of what to do and when (Interview P Nov, 2025)

Sex education encourages learners to avoid unplanned pregnancies, reduces the risk of STIs & HIV, promotes healthy and respectful relationships and improves mental & emotional well-being (Interview F Nov 2025)

These findings demonstrate near-universal agreement on the multidimensional benefits of sexual education. Respondents perceive sexual education not only as a health intervention but also as a moral, social, and academic support mechanism. The strong link made between sexual education and academic performance suggests recognition that health and learning outcomes are interconnected.

The consensus among respondents strengthens the argument for integrating sexual education into higher learning institutions. When students are informed and supported, they are more likely to make responsible choices that reduce health risks and academic disruptions such as absenteeism, stigma, or dropout due to unplanned pregnancies.

Sexual education promotes responsible behavior among students.

33 responses

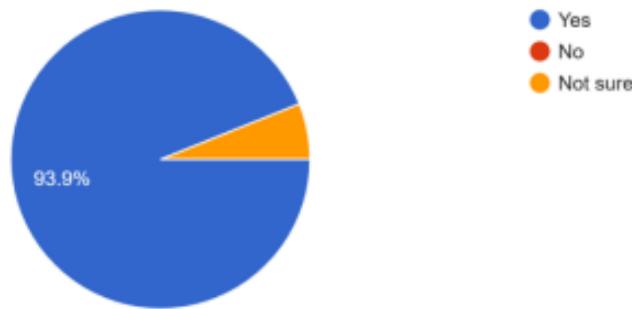


Figure 5: Sexual education promotes responsible sexual behaviour

I believe sexual education should focus on both moral and health aspects

34 responses

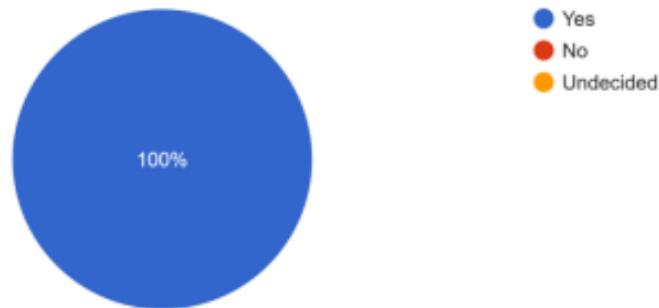


Figure 6: Sexual education in moral and health

Sexual education enhances students' academic focus and discipline

34 responses

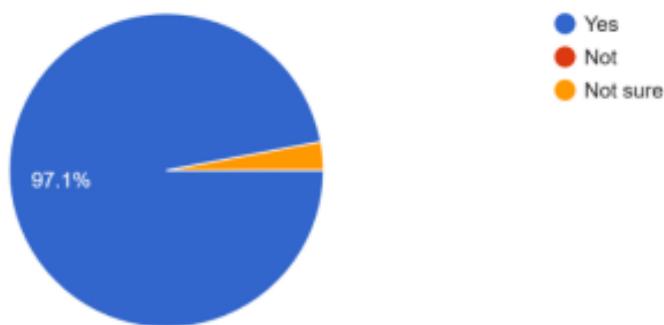


Figure 7: Sexual behaviour and academic performance

Proper sexual education can reduce cases of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

34 responses

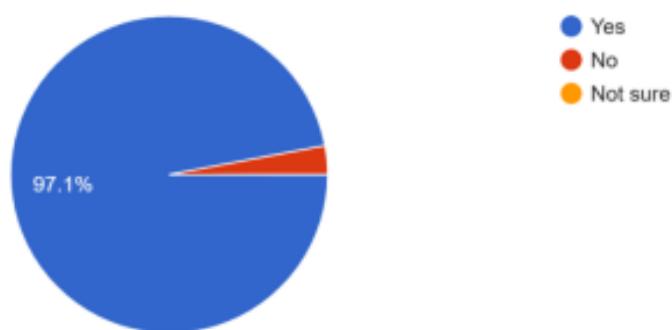


Figure 8: Sexual education and unwanted pregnancies

Sexual education helps students develop respect for themselves and others

34 responses

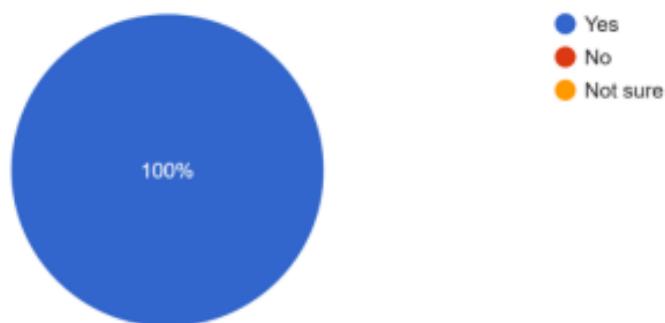


Figure 9: Sexual education and self respect

10. Challenges associated with the lack of sexual education among students in higher learning institutions.

Risk sexual behaviour

The findings indicate a strong consensus on the importance of sexual education. An overwhelming

97.1% of respondents agreed that a lack of sexual education leads to risky sexual behaviours, demonstrating widespread awareness of the protective role that sexual education plays in shaping responsible behaviour. This suggests that respondents recognise sexual education as a critical component in preventing negative sexual health outcomes. Only 2.9% did not agree, showing that risk behaviour may be caused by other factors, not only sexual behaviour.

Lack of open discussion about sexual education in higher learning institutions

Despite this high level of awareness, actual engagement in sexual education discussions appears inconsistent. Slightly over half of the respondents (52.9%) reported having open discussions about sexual education. However, a considerable proportion indicated limited or no engagement: 29.4% reported that sexual education was not a focus, while 17.6% reported no discussion at all. And 0.1% were undecided. This disparity reveals a clear gap between knowledge of the importance of sexual education and its practical implementation.

Role of lecturers in providing sexual education

Regarding the role of lecturers in providing sexual education, 67.6% of respondents reported that lecturers provide informal sexual education, indicating that educators play a supportive but largely unstructured role in addressing sexual health issues. However, 17.6% stated that lecturers do not provide such education, and 14.7% believed that sexual education is not the responsibility of lecturers. These findings suggest ambiguity and a lack of consensus regarding institutional responsibility for sexual education.

Overall, the results point to a mismatch between perceived importance and structured delivery of sexual education. While awareness is nearly universal, the absence of formalised programs and unclear role expectations—particularly for lecturers—may limit the effectiveness of sexual education efforts. The findings highlight the need for clear institutional policies and structured sexual education programs to ensure consistent and comprehensive delivery, thereby reducing risky behaviours among learners.

Pregnancy among female students

The findings show that the occurrence of the phenomenon under study is concentrated in the early

years of study, with 32.4% occurring in the first year alone. This suggests that students are particularly vulnerable during their initial transition into the academic environment. First-year students often face new social freedoms, limited supervision, and adjustment challenges, which may expose them to higher risks compared to students in later years.

A further 23.5% of occurrences were reported during both the first and second years, reinforcing the view that the early phase of tertiary education represents a critical period of risk. This extended vulnerability may be associated with ongoing adaptation processes, peer influence, and limited access to accurate information or support services during the initial years.

Occurrences exclusively in the second year accounted for 11.8%, while 17.7% occurred during the second and third years. Although lower than first-year figures, these results indicate that risk does not disappear after the first year but rather persists into subsequent years, possibly due to cumulative exposure, evolving relationships, or continued engagement in risky behaviours.

Only smaller proportions were reported in later years, suggesting that as students progress academically, they may develop greater maturity, improved coping strategies, and increased awareness of consequences. Senior students are also more likely to have benefited from peer learning, institutional guidance, and personal experience, which may reduce vulnerability over time.

The findings suggest that while some students engage in discussions about sexual matters, a significant proportion do not, indicating silence and avoidance around sexual education. Informal provision by lecturers further highlights the absence of a clear institutional policy. Pregnancy data confirm that the early years of university pose the highest risk, aligning with earlier findings on sexual activity patterns.

The lack of formal sexual education places both students and lecturers in an uncertain position. Informal discussions, though helpful, may lack consistency, professional guidance, and ethical boundaries. Early pregnancies disrupt academic progress and reflect inadequate preparation for sexual and reproductive health challenges at university entry.

Refer to **Figures 10, 11, 12 and 13.**

Lack of sexual education can lead to risky sexual behavior among students.

34 responses

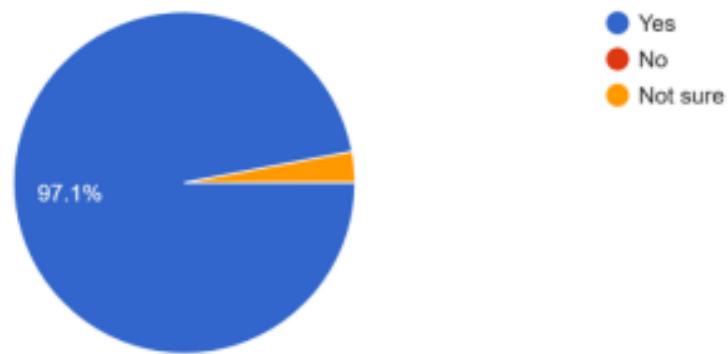


Figure 10: Lack of sexual education

Students are open to discussing sexual education issues at the university

34 responses

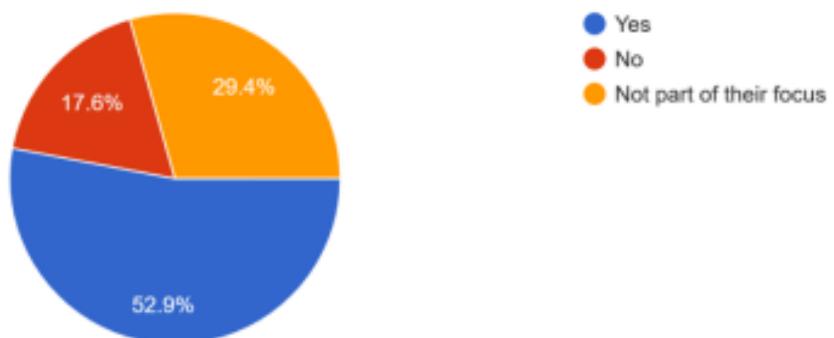


Figure 11: Sexual education at University

Lecturers play an important role in providing sexual education awareness

34 responses

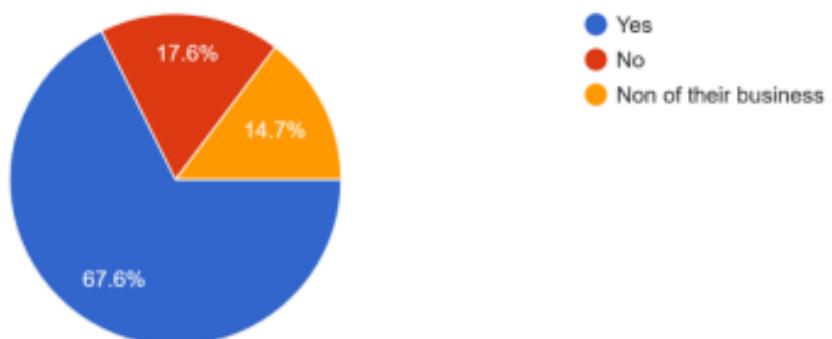


Figure 12: Role of Lecturers in providing sexual education

Give your own experience when most of female students are seen pregnant at your University
34 responses

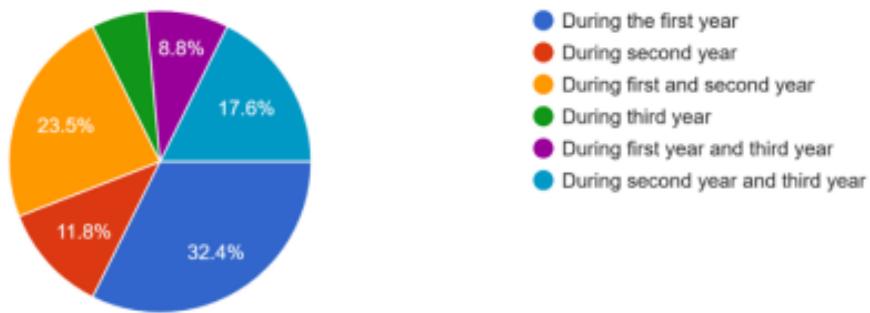


Figure 13: Female students and pregnancy rate

11. Strategies for effectively addressing sexual education issues in higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

Sexual education to be a core course in higher learning institution

The respondents proposed and demonstrated a strong support for the institutionalisation of sexual education, with an overwhelming 88.2% of respondents agreeing that sexual education should be a core course. This level of agreement indicates a broad recognition of the importance of comprehensive sexual education in promoting informed decision-making, healthy relationships, and the prevention of risky sexual behaviours among students. The result suggests that respondents perceive sexual education not merely as supplementary knowledge but as an essential component of formal education. The interview responses showed that sex education makes learners focus on what brought them to universities/colleges and prevents them from contracting diseases and unplanned pregnancies. Below are the anchor examples:

Sexual education is very important and should be provided as a core course since it will help in preventing unplanned pregnancy, promote informed decision-making, also it reduces HIV risks. (Interview D Nov. 2025)

Sex education helps self-understanding, and it encourages respect and healthy relationships, which will make a learner focus on academic issues rather than love affairs. (Interview M Nov 2025)

In contrast, 8.8% of respondents preferred sexual education to be offered as an optional course. This minority view may reflect personal, cultural, or

religious considerations, or a belief that sexual education should be a matter of individual choice rather than institutional requirement. While relatively small, this group highlights the need for sensitivity and inclusivity in curriculum design.

Only 2.9% of respondents disagreed with the inclusion of sexual education in the curriculum, indicating minimal resistance. This low level of opposition further underscores the general acceptance of sexual education and suggests that concerns about its appropriateness or relevance are not widespread among the study population.

Overall, the findings point to a clear mandate for policy and curriculum reform, supporting the integration of sexual education as a compulsory course. Making sexual education a core course would ensure consistent access to accurate information for all students, reduce disparities in knowledge, and contribute to positive health and social outcomes. However, curriculum developers should consider culturally responsive approaches and participatory teaching methods to address the concerns of the minority who prefer optional inclusion.

Sexual education supports holistic development

In the field questionnaires, it was revealed that: 88.2% agreed that sexual education supports holistic development, 8.8% were not sure, 2.9% disagreed. These findings reveal a strong consensus on the role of sexual education in supporting holistic development, with 88.2% of respondents agreeing that sexual education contributes positively to learners' overall growth. This suggests that the majority of respondents view sexual education as extending beyond biological

knowledge to include emotional, social, moral, and psychological development. Such a perception aligns with holistic education principles, which emphasise the balanced development of cognitive, affective, and social domains.

A small proportion of respondents (8.8%) indicated that they were not sure about the contribution of sexual education to holistic development. This uncertainty may reflect limited exposure to structured sexual education programmes or a lack of clarity about how sexual education addresses broader developmental outcomes such as self-esteem, decision-making skills, and interpersonal relationships. It may also suggest the need for clearer communication regarding the objectives and scope of sexual education within educational institutions.

Only 2.9% of respondents disagreed that sexual education supports holistic development, indicating minimal resistance to this perspective. The low level of disagreement suggests that negative perceptions of sexual education are not widespread and may be influenced by individual beliefs, cultural norms, or misconceptions rather than empirical evidence.

The study strongly supports the inclusion of sexual education as a key component of holistic education (Mwakalinga, 2024). They underscore the importance of designing comprehensive sexual education programmes that integrate physical, emotional, social, and ethical dimensions, thereby contributing to well-rounded learner development. Educational stakeholders should therefore prioritise well-structured and age-appropriate sexual education to enhance holistic outcomes while addressing areas of uncertainty among a small minority.

In the interview and focus group discussion responses showed that topics like: Sexual and reproductive health, Gender and identity, Moral aspects of sexual behaviour, Relationships and Psychological aspects of sexual activities are important to be included in the sexual education course to be provided as among the university courses. Below are the anchor examples:

.... You know, sexual education is very important to be taught at the university level because adolescents are affected by a lack of such education. Topics like: Sexual reproductive health, Gender and identity, Moral aspects of sexual behaviour, Relationships, Psychological aspects of sexual activities are important for bringing awareness among the learners (Focus group G Nov, 2025).

.....Yes, the course can also include: Relationship, Sexual disease, Ethics of the college, Sources of misunderstanding, Time management (Focus group V Nov 2025)

The strong support for making sexual education a core course reflects students' recognition of its relevance to personal, social, and academic development. The emphasis on holistic development aligns with educational goals that extend beyond cognitive achievement.

These findings suggest that formalising sexual education within university curricula could address existing gaps, reduce health risks, and support student well-being. Institutionalising sexual education would ensure consistency, credibility, and inclusivity while reducing reliance on informal and potentially inaccurate sources

Refer to **Figures 14 and 15**.

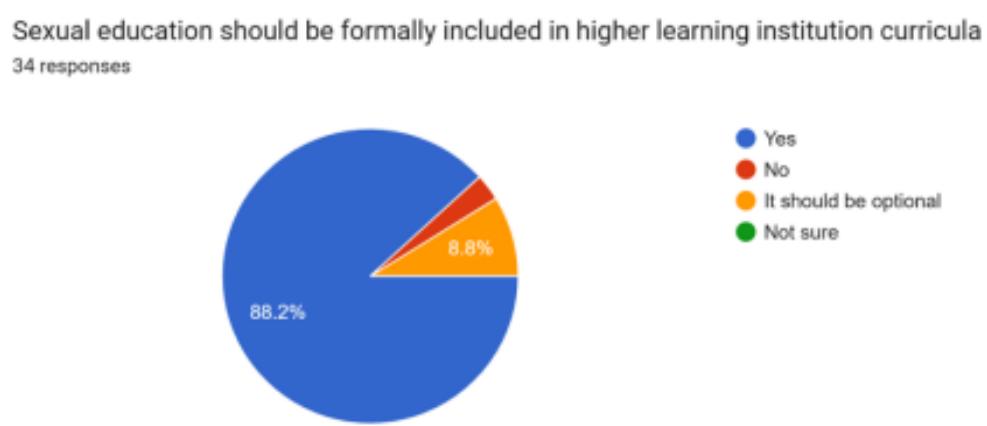


Figure 14: Including sexual education in Higher learning institutions

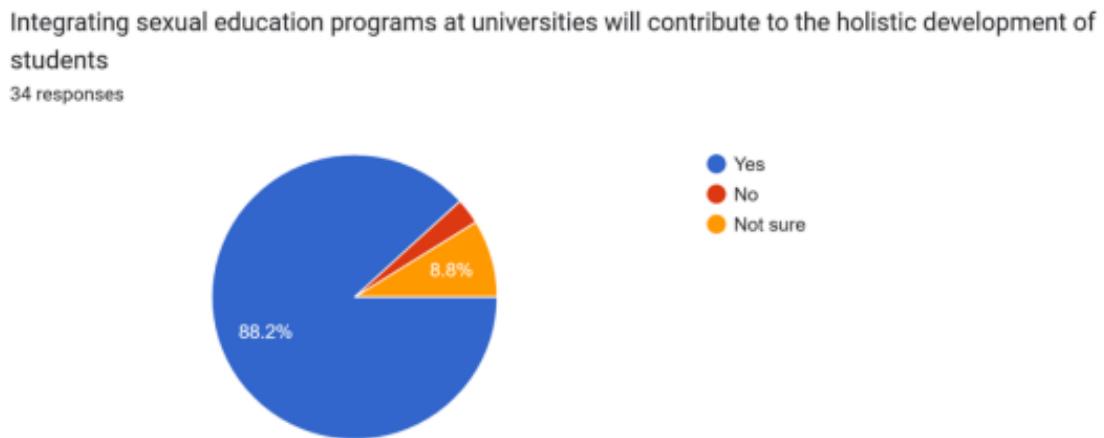


Figure 15: Sexual education and holistic students development

12. Conclusion

The findings clearly indicate that although awareness of sexual education is high among students and lecturers in Tanzanian higher learning institutions, formal provision remains inadequate. Early exposure to sexual activity, high rates of first-year pregnancies, and reliance on informal education underscore the urgent need for structured, curriculum-based sexual education to promote responsible behaviour, health, and academic success.

13. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Integration of Sexual Education into University Curricula

Higher learning institutions in Tanzania should integrate sexual education into the formal curriculum as a **core course**, particularly during the first year of study. This would ensure that all students receive accurate, standardised, and developmentally appropriate information at a critical transition stage. Also, sexual education should be prioritised during student orientation programmes. Early intervention can address risky behaviours commonly observed in the first year and help students align their academic goals with responsible personal decision-making.

Promotion of Safe and Open Dialogue on Sexual Education

Universities should create safe spaces for open discussion through seminars, workshops, peer-education programmes, and counselling services. Encouraging respectful dialogue can reduce stigma,

misinformation, and silence surrounding sexual health issues. Moreover, Higher learning institutions should strengthen campus-based health and counselling services to provide youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health information, counselling, and referral services that complement classroom-based education.

This study recommend that future studies should explore the long-term impact of formal sexual education programmes on students' academic outcomes, behaviour change, and well-being, as well as comparative studies across different regions and institutional types in Tanzania.

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