

Factors Affecting Teachers' Intention to Undertake Sexuality Education in Universities in Guangdong Province

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Received November 29, 2024; Revised June 8, 2025; Accepted September 19, 2025

Abstract

This study explores the factors influencing university teachers' intention to implement sexuality education in Guangdong Province, China, in response to increasing societal attention and policy support for comprehensive sex education. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected from 357 in-service university teachers through a structured questionnaire, and analyzed via Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results indicate that both external environmental factors—such as policy backing, social recognition, and institutional support—and internal factors—namely teachers' knowledge and attitudes—have significant positive effects on perceived usefulness and teaching intention. Furthermore, perceived usefulness plays a partial mediating role between these factors and teachers' implementation intention. The model demonstrated good fit indices ($CFI=0.991$, $RMSEA=0.024$), confirming the validity of the hypothesized pathways. These findings highlight the importance of providing continuous policy support, cultivating an inclusive school environment, and offering targeted professional training. Strengthening perceived usefulness can effectively enhance teachers' engagement in sexuality education and contribute to the sustainable implementation of such programs within higher education settings.

Keywords: Sex Education; Teacher Intentions; External Support; Perceived Utility

Introduction

The role of university teachers in delivering sexuality education is essential to fostering students' understanding of sexual health and related social and ethical considerations. Teachers' intentions and behaviors around sexuality education, however, are influenced by various factors, which can hinder the effectiveness of such programs (Chow & Liu, 2012).

Sexuality education, a significant part of modern education, began in the late 19th century, primarily focusing on disease prevention and social control. Over time, its scope broadened to include ethics in sexual behavior, social responsibility, gender equality, and sexual rights. Western countries have since integrated these topics, culminating in the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) model, which emphasizes both physical knowledge and social competence. For university students, who face a range of sexual health challenges, educators are expected to promote awareness and responsible behaviors (Cunha-Oliveira et al., 2021).

In China, implementing sexuality education in universities faces unique challenges due to traditional cultural norms and limited resources. Despite growing support from society and government policies, sexuality education remains largely underdeveloped, especially in areas with conservative social attitudes (Liang, 2010). Consequently, understanding the factors influencing teachers' intentions to implement sexuality education is crucial for effective curriculum integration. This study, therefore, aims to identify the determinants that affect teachers' intentions, providing insights for policy development and teacher training in Guangdong Province.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the key factors affecting the intention of teachers to implement sex education in Guangdong Province's colleges and universities.
2. Explore the mechanisms by which external and internal environmental support influences college teachers' intentions to implement sex education through perceived usefulness.
3. Analyze the direct relationship between external and internal environmental support on the intentions of college teachers to implement sex education.

Literature Review

1. Concept of Internal Environment and Related Studies

The internal environment in education refers to individual characteristics of teachers, such as their knowledge, attitudes, and confidence in a subject. In sexuality education, internal factors like these play a crucial role, as effective teaching requires handling sensitive topics and ethical discussions. Studies suggest that teachers' knowledge impacts their willingness to use interactive methods and address complex issues confidently (Vanwesenbeeck, 2020; Miedema et al., 2020). Teachers with comprehensive knowledge and positive attitudes towards sex education are better equipped to teach these topics effectively.

2. Concept of External Environment and Related Studies

The external environment includes social and institutional support that affects teachers' decisions to implement sexuality education. According to Ecological Systems Theory, behavior is influenced by multilevel environmental factors, including school policies and social attitudes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The external environment in sexuality education includes social support from parents, the community, and policy support from schools. Teachers in supportive environments are more open to discussing sensitive topics in classrooms (Evans & Pederson, 2000).

3. Concepts of Perceived Usefulness and Related Studies

Perceived usefulness, from the Technology Acceptance Model, describes how individuals believe a practice will improve their performance. In education, teachers who perceive sexuality education as beneficial for students' development are more likely to implement it. Perceived usefulness is also influenced by policy support and available resources, which affect teachers' attitudes and practices (Tan & Tasir, 2024).

4. Conceptualization of the Intention to Implement Sex Education and Related Studies

Behavioral intention, as defined by the Theory of Planned Behavior, is the commitment to undertake a behavior. In sexuality education, intention includes a teacher's willingness to integrate these topics into their teaching practices. Factors influencing this intention include teachers' attitudes, the perceived value of sexuality education, and social support (Ajzen, 1991).

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 1, illustrates the relationships between the internal and external environments, perceived usefulness, and college teachers' intentions, offering a foundation for understanding the interplay of these factors in implementing sexuality education. Specifically, the framework posits several hypotheses: H1, external environmental support significantly and positively influences college teachers' intention to implement sex education through perceived usefulness; H2, the internal environment significantly and positively influences college teachers' intention to implement sex education through perceived usefulness; H3, perceived usefulness mediates the relationship between the external environment, the internal environment, and the intentions of college teachers to implement sex education. Moreover, H4 suggests a significant positive correlation between external environmental support and the perceived usefulness of college teachers, while H5 highlights a similar positive correlation between the internal environment and perceived usefulness in higher education.

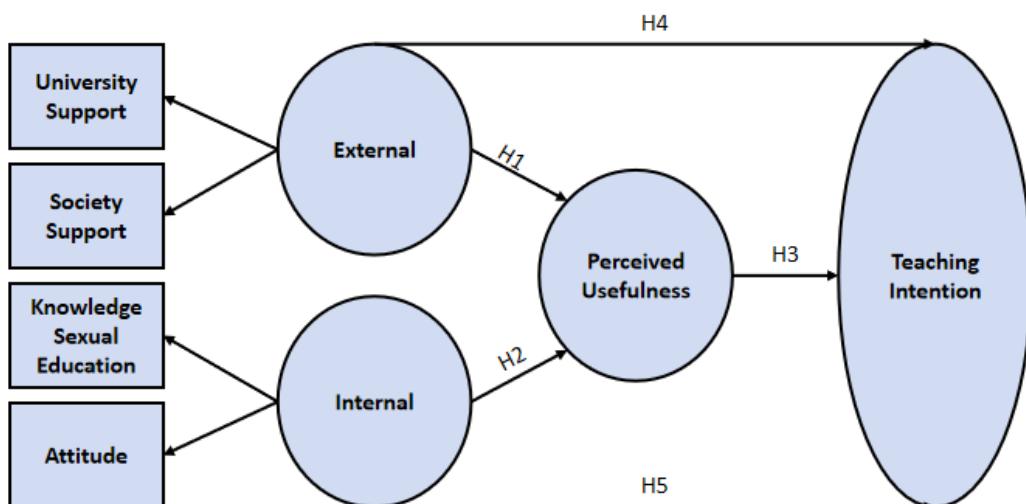


Figure 1 The conceptual framework (Source: Constructed by researcher, 2024)

Research Methodology

1. Population and Sample

The study focuses on in-service university teachers in Guangdong Province responsible for or involved in implementing sexuality education. To ensure a diverse and representative sample, stratified

random sampling was employed. Stratification criteria included institution type (comprehensive universities, normal universities, and specialized colleges), geographic location (provincial capitals, prefecture-level cities, and economically developed counties), and teaching seniority. A target sample size of 250–400 was established to achieve reliable and statistically significant results.

2. Research Tools

The primary research instrument was a structured questionnaire designed to measure key variables, including external environmental support, internal environmental factors (e.g., teachers' knowledge and attitudes), perceived usefulness, and intentions to implement sexuality education. The questionnaire consisted of sections corresponding to these variables and used a 5-point Likert scale for responses.

To ensure quality, the questionnaire was developed based on a review of relevant literature and validated through expert feedback and pilot testing. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for all sections exceeded 0.7, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Validity was assessed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) values surpassing thresholds of 0.5 and 0.7, affirming convergent and discriminant validity.

3. Data Collection

Data collection took place between September 2023 and January 2024 and employed both online and offline methods to maximize participation. Online questionnaires were distributed via the Questionnaire Star platform, enabling teachers to respond at their convenience, while paper questionnaires were administered during classes and meetings for those preferring traditional methods. Regular follow-ups ensured a high response rate, and all returned questionnaires were reviewed for completeness and accuracy before analysis.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis involved several steps to test the hypothesized relationships:

Data Pre-Processing: Outliers were removed, and missing data were addressed to ensure data integrity.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis: Demographic data, such as age, teaching experience, and institution type, were analyzed to profile the sample.

Correlation Analysis: Relationships among key variables (external and internal environments, perceived usefulness, and implementation intentions) were examined.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM): SEM was applied to analyze both direct and indirect effects, testing the hypothesized pathways and mediating role of perceived usefulness.

Model Fit Testing: Model fit was evaluated using indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), confirming the adequacy of the model in explaining observed data.

This methodology provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors influencing university teachers' intentions to implement sexuality education and offers robust insights into the mediating role of perceived usefulness.

Research results

1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, with 357 valid responses included for analysis. The descriptive analysis explored key demographics and variables related to the intention to implement sex education.

1.1 Demographic Overview

Gender Distribution: Female respondents constituted 52.1%, and males accounted for 47.9%, reflecting a near balance but with a slightly higher representation of females.

Age Distribution: The majority of respondents were aged 26–35 (48.74%), followed by those aged 36–45 (28.57%). Respondents under 25 and over 45 were less represented (2.8% and 19.89%, respectively).

Educational Attainment: Most respondents held master's degrees (57.42%), followed by doctoral degrees (30.53%). Only 12.04% held bachelor's degrees, reflecting a highly educated sample.

Professional Titles: Lecturers (63.87%) significantly outnumbered professors (36.13%), indicating a higher proportion of mid-level academic staff in the sample.

1.2 Analysis of mean values

Key dimensions were analyzed for their mean values:

University Support: Mean value = 3.499, indicating moderate support from schools in providing teaching resources, encouragement, and training opportunities.

Social Support: Mean value = 3.412, showing moderate support from parents, media, and

government, though improvements are needed.

Knowledge of Sex Education: Mean value = 3.345, suggesting that teachers still need to enhance their understanding of sexual health and rights.

Attitudes Towards Sex Education: Mean value = 3.402, indicating a generally positive attitude among teachers.

Perceived Usefulness: Mean value = 3.339, suggesting mixed opinions about the effectiveness of sex education courses.

Teaching Intention: Mean value = 3.285, indicating relatively low motivation to implement sex education.

2. Reliability and validity analysis

2.1 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis assesses the consistency of responses to quantitative data, particularly in attitude scales. SPSS 27 was used for the reliability analysis of the questionnaire.

The formal survey data was divided into six dimensions: university support, social support, sexual education knowledge, attitudes, perceived usefulness, and teaching intention. The Cronbach α coefficients for all dimensions were above 0.8, with the lowest being 0.807. The overall reliability of the questionnaire was 0.901, indicating high data reliability, suitable for further analysis.

2.2 Validity analysis

Table 1 KMO and Bartlett tests were used for validity verification.

KMO value	0.882	
	Approximate Chi-square	3086.322
Bartlett sphericity test	df	153
	p value	0.000

As can be seen from the table above: the KMO value is 0.882, and the KMO value is greater than 0.8, the research data is very suitable for extracting information (the validity reflected from the side is very good).

3. Exploratory factor analysis

A KMO value greater than 0.6 meets the prerequisite requirements of factor analysis, which means that the data can be used for factor analysis research. And the data passed the Bartlett sphericity

test ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the research data was suitable for factor analysis.

The situation of factor extraction and the information amount of factor extraction. It can be seen from the above table that: A total of 6 factors were extracted from the factor analysis, all of which had eigenroot values greater than 1. The variance interpretation rate of the 6 factors after rotation was 12.845%, 12.749%, 12.702%, 12.352%, 12.350%, 12.189%, and the cumulative variance interpretation rate after rotation was 75.187%. In addition, the variance interpretation rates (information extraction amount) of the 6 factors were 12.845%, 12.749%, 12.702%, 12.352%, 12.350%, 12.189%, respectively. The distribution of information extraction amount was relatively uniform, which comprehensively indicated that the factor analysis results were good.

The information extraction of factors for research items, and the corresponding relationship between factors and research items. The common degree value of all research items is higher than 0.4, which means that there is a strong correlation between research items and factors, and factors can effectively extract information. At the same time, it can be seen that factor 1 corresponds to teaching attitude in the questionnaire; Factor 2 corresponds to social support in the questionnaire; Factor 3 corresponds to perceived usefulness in the questionnaire; Factor 4 corresponded to teachers' intention to implement sex education in the questionnaire; Factor 5 corresponds to the knowledge of sex education in the questionnaire; Factor 6 corresponded to school support in the questionnaire; It is consistent with the initial assumption of the questionnaire, indicating that the questionnaire has good structural validity.

4. Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis is used to study the correlation between teachers' intention to implement sex education, school support, social support, sex education knowledge, teaching attitude and perceived usefulness.

Table 2 Correlation Analysis

	University support	Social support	Knowledge sexual education	Attitudes	Perceived Teaching usefulness	Teaching intention
University support	1					
Social support	0.498 **	1				
Knowledge sexual education	0.391 **	0.402 **	1			

	University support	Social support	Knowledge sexual education	Attitudes	Perceived Teaching usefulness	Teaching Intention
Attitudes	0.305 * *	0.320 * *	0.541 * *	1		
Perceived usefulness		0.361 * *	0.382 * *	0.411 * *	0.403 * *	1
Teaching Intention	0.385 * *		0.345 * *	0.423 * *	0.380 * *	0.448 * * 1

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01

Pearson correlation coefficient was used to represent the strength of the correlation. Specific analysis shows that:

The correlation value between the intention of teachers to implement sex education and the support of schools is 0.385, and the significance level is 0.01, indicating that there is a significant positive correlation between the intention of teachers to implement sex education and the support of schools.

The correlation value between the intention of teachers to implement sex education and social support is 0.345, and the significance level is 0.01, which indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between the intention of teachers to implement sex education and social support.

The correlation value between the intention of teachers to implement sex education and the knowledge of sex education is 0.423, and the significance level is 0.01, which indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between the intention of teachers to implement sex education and the knowledge of sex education.

The correlation value between teachers' intention to implement sex education and teaching attitude is 0.380, and the significance level is 0.01, which indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between teachers' intention to implement sex education and teaching attitude.

The correlation value between teachers' intention to implement sex education and perceived usefulness is 0.448, showing a level of significance of 0.01, which indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between teachers' intention to implement sex education and perceived usefulness.

5. Confirmatory factor analysis

Before building the model, the questionnaire items were numbered as follows: External Factors (A) include University Support (Aa): Aa1 – The school provides adequate teaching resources for

implementing sexual education curriculum; Aa2 – School leaders encourage teachers to implement sexual education curriculum; Aa3 – The school provides training opportunities related to sexual education. Social Support (Ab) includes Ab1 – Parents are supportive of the sexual education curriculum in schools; Ab2 – Media coverage of sexual education can help increase societal acceptance; Ab3 – The government has provided adequate policy support to encourage schools to offer sexual education.

Internal Factors (B) include Knowledge of Sexual Education (Ba): Ba1 – I have a thorough understanding of sexual health education content in the curriculum; Ba2 – I am confident in delivering the content of the sexual education curriculum to students; Ba3 – I understand the relevant knowledge of gender equality and sexual rights in the sexual education curriculum. Attitudes (Bb) include Bb1 – I think sex education courses are very important for students' development; Bb2 – I have a positive attitude towards sex education courses and am willing to implement them; Bb3 – I think schools and society should give more support to sex education courses.

Perceived Usefulness (C) includes: C1 – Sex education courses can significantly improve students' knowledge of sexual health; C2 – Sex education courses contribute to students' psychological development; C3 – Sex education courses are very useful in helping students cope with issues related to sexual behavior. Teaching Intention (D) includes: D1 – I am willing to participate more in the teaching of sex education courses in the future; D2 – I will regularly evaluate and improve my methods of teaching sex education; D3 – I intend to integrate multiple resources and methods of sex education into my teaching.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) involves six sub-levels: school support, social support, sexual education knowledge, teaching attitudes, perceived usefulness, and teachers' intention to implement sex education, covering a total of 18 measurement items. The CFA factor analysis is shown in the Figure 2.

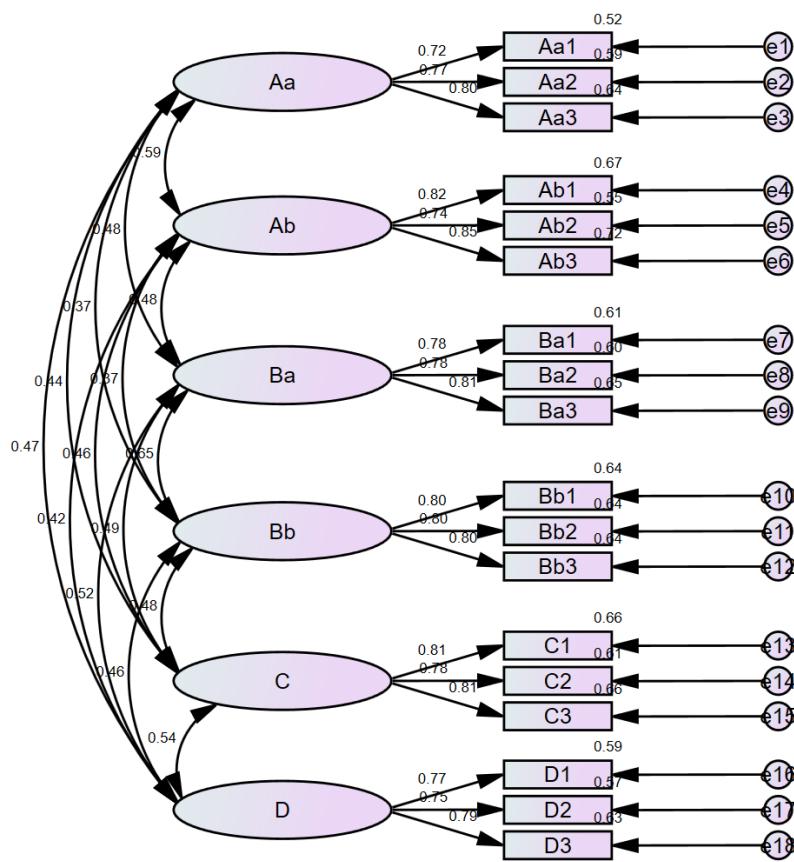


Figure 2 CFA factor analysis (Source: Constructed by researcher, 2024)

The value of factor loading shows the correlation between the factor (latent variable) and the analysis item (explicit variable/measurement item). The standard load factor value is usually used to show the correlation between the factor and the analysis item (measurement item); If an item is significant and the standard load coefficient value is greater than 0.7, it indicates a strong correlation; If an item does not show significance, or the standard load coefficient value is low (such as below 0.4), then the relationship between the item and the factor is weak, and it can be considered to remove the item.

6. Structural equation analysis

Structural equation modeling is a method for building, estimating, and testing models of causality. It can replace multiple, path analysis, factor analysis, covariance analysis and other methods to clearly analyze the effect of individual indicators on the overall and the relationship between individual indicators.

Structural equation model consists of two parts, namely the measurement relationship and the influence relationship. When a measurement relationship and an influence relationship are included in a study, such a study can be called a structural equation model. The focus of structural equation model is to study the influence relationship and test the hypothesis. Measurement relationship is not the focus of attention, but the quality of measurement relationship will have a great impact on the model fitting, so researchers need to ensure the quality of measurement relationship first.

Based on this, the structural equation modeling of the model is carried out in this paper according to the model established above. The standardized path coefficient means that in structural equation models, the relationship between variables is usually represented by arrows, and the numbers at both ends of the arrows are the standardized path coefficients. This coefficient takes a value between 0 and 1 and indicates the strength and dimension of the relationship between the variables. If the coefficient is positive, it indicates a positive correlation between the variables; If the coefficient is negative, it means the variables are negatively correlated; If the coefficient is 0, it means there is no relationship between the variables, and the standardized path coefficient can also be used to compare the strength of the relationship between different variables. The larger the coefficient, the stronger the relationship between the two variables; The smaller the coefficient, the weaker the relationship between the two variables, the model is run, its standardized coefficient output results are as follows:

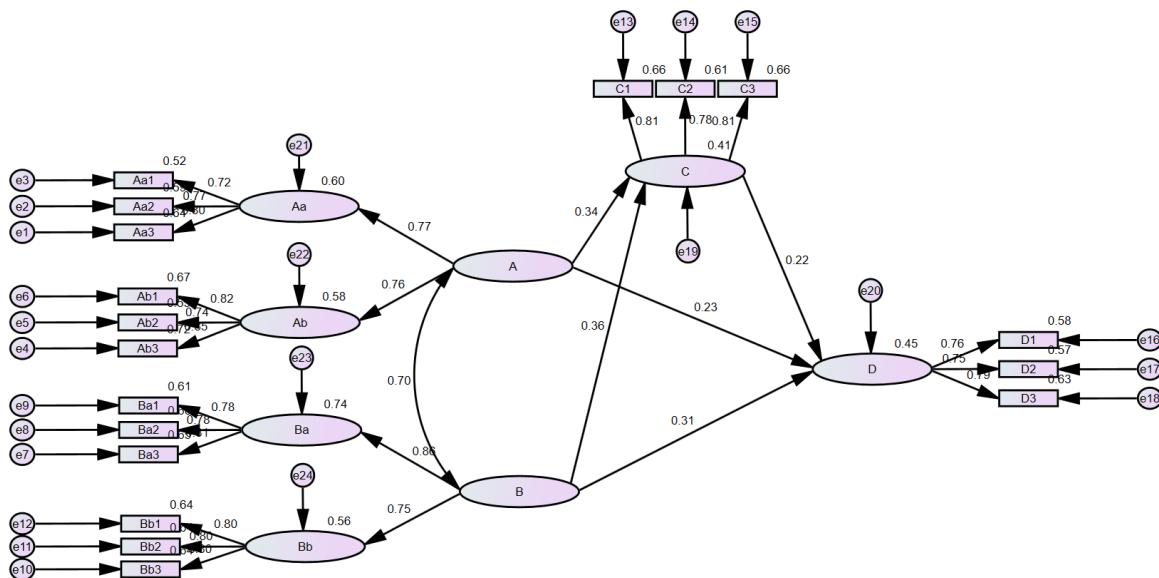


Figure 3 The model and output results (Source: Constructed by researcher, 2024)

Table 3 structural equation model fit degree

Fit index	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	GFI	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI
Adaptation criteria	< 3-5	< 0.08	> 0.85	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9
Test results	1.213	0.024	0.954	0.952	0.991	0.989	0.991
Fit judgment	Matching	Matching	Normal	Matching	Matching	Matching	Matching

According to the fitting result of structural equation model, the CMIN/DF value is 1.213, reaching the fitting standard < 3 to 5, the square root RMSEA value is 0.024, less than the critical value of 0.08, and the statistical tests GFI, NFI, IFI, TLI and CFI all meet the fitting standard, indicating that the model has a good fit and ideal intrinsic quality.

Table 4 structural equation model path coefficients

Structural Equation path	Non-standard path coefficients			S.E.	C.R.	P	Standard path coefficient
Perceived usefulness	<---	External factors	.465	.160	2.908	.004	.337
Perceived usefulness	<---	Internal factors	.428	.136	3.140	.002	.356
Teaching Intention	<---	External factors	.279	.140	1.998	.046	.230
Teaching Intention	<---	Internal factors	.330	.120	2.745	.006	.313
Teaching Intention	<---	Perceived Usefulness	.196	.070	2.812	.005	.224

Based on the structural equation model path coefficients, both external and internal environmental support have significant positive impacts on perceived usefulness, with standard path coefficients of 0.337 ($P=0.004$) and 0.356 ($P=0.002$) respectively, confirming the validity of the hypotheses. Additionally, external and internal environmental support also significantly positively affect teachers' intention to implement sex education, with standard path coefficients of 0.230 ($P=0.046$) and

0.313 ($P=0.006$) respectively. Furthermore, perceived usefulness has a significant positive impact on teachers' intention to implement sex education, with a standard path coefficient of 0.224 ($P=0.005$), confirming the hypothesis.

7. Mediating role

The final process of X through M to Y, where a represents the coefficient from X to M, b represents the coefficient from M to Y, c represents the total effect from X to Y, and c^* represents the direct effect from X to Y.

If $c^* \neq 0$, then M is a partial mediator between X and Y; If $c^* = 0$, then M is a complete mediation from X to Y. a^*b represents the mediating effect, and the total effect is equal to the sum of the direct effect and the mediating effect, i.e. $c = a^*b + c^*$.

The mediation path of this model, "external environment support => perceived usefulness => teachers' intention to implement sex education", "internal environment support => perceived usefulness => teachers' intention to implement sex education", was analyzed. As shown in the table 5:

Table 5 Mediating Role Analysis

item	c Total effect	a	b	a*b mediating effect	c* Direct effect	Effect			Test conclusion
						proportion calculation	Effect proportion	Test formula	
External factors => perceived usefulness =>Teaching Intention	0.305	0.34	0.22	0.075	0.23	a*b/c	24.54%		Partial intermediation
Internal factors=> perceived usefulness => Teaching Intention	0.389	0.36	0.22	0.079	0.31	a*b/c	20.35%		Partial mediation

Table 6 Indirect Effect Analysis: Significance Testing of Mediating Paths

item	Symbols Meaning	Effect size effect	95% CI		Standard error value	z value /t value	p value	Conclusion
			Lower Limit	Upper limit				
External factors => Perceived usefulness => Teaching Intention	a^*b	Indirect effects	0.075	0.032	0.108	0.019	3.983	0.000
Internal factors => perceived usefulness => Teaching Intention	a^*b	Indirect effects	0.079	0.041	0.133	0.024	3.677	0.000

As can be seen from the above table, $c^* \neq 0$, the mediating paths "External factors => perceived usefulness =>Teaching Intention" and "Internal factors => perceived usefulness =>Teaching Intention" are both partial mediators.

Discussion

The study validates the significant influence of both external and internal environmental factors on teachers' willingness to implement sexuality education. These findings resonate with David and Aruta (2022), who argue that policy clarity, societal endorsement, and institutional leadership are essential drivers for advancing sexuality education. In the present study, strong external support predicted higher perceived usefulness and directly improved teachers' teaching intentions. This supports the assertion that institutional backing legitimizes sensitive curriculum content, fostering teacher confidence.

Simultaneously, internal factors—teachers' knowledge and attitudes—were shown to be crucial. Consistent with Swanepoel et al. (2017), the data confirmed that teachers' positive attitudes and subject mastery significantly enhance their likelihood to embrace sexuality education. Educators with more comprehensive understanding perceived the content as more beneficial and were thus more willing to teach it. This confirms the role of targeted training in fostering a sense of utility and responsibility.

The mediating role of perceived usefulness, as highlighted by Zulu et al. (2019), underlines its central function in the causal chain between support systems and behavioral outcomes. When teachers believe that their instruction meaningfully impacts student development, their motivation increases. This emphasizes the need for institutional mechanisms—such as feedback systems and success case sharing—that reinforce perceived relevance.

Despite the robust model fit and significant paths, the findings should be contextualized within broader sociocultural dynamics. Cultural norms, regional diversity, and institutional autonomy may mediate or moderate these relationships. Thus, further qualitative investigations could uncover latent factors that enrich this framework and offer a more holistic perspective on teacher engagement in sexuality education.

Conclusion

This study confirms that both external and internal factors significantly influence teachers' intention to implement sexuality education. External supports, such as policies and societal attitudes, as well as internal supports like teachers' knowledge and attitudes, directly enhance their motivation and perceived usefulness of the curriculum. Additionally, perceived usefulness serves as a mediating factor, linking these supports to teachers' teaching intentions, highlighting its critical role in determining commitment. Future research should explore broader variables, diverse educational contexts, and innovative methodologies to further elucidate these findings, thereby supporting policy development and educational practices in sexuality education across varied settings.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations can help strengthen teachers' intention to implement sexuality education. Educational institutions should secure policy backing and resources, promoting collaboration between schools, parents, and the media to shape positive societal views. Government support, clear guidelines, and access to teaching materials are crucial. Regular professional development and in-school support platforms can enhance teachers' expertise and confidence. Interdisciplinary teaching models combining sexuality education with subjects like psychology and sociology can enrich the curriculum. Schools can also improve teachers' perceptions of the course's value by collecting feedback from students and parents and encouraging self-reflection. Implementing rigorous evaluation criteria and continuous improvement processes will optimize the program's effectiveness. Incentivizing innovative teaching strategies can help maintain high teaching quality. Furthermore, schools should recognize sexuality education as a societal responsibility and involve various sectors in building a broader support system.

For future research, studies could explore the long-term impact of enhanced support systems on the sustainability of sexuality education programs. Investigating the effectiveness of interdisciplinary models and feedback-driven improvements would provide deeper insights into teacher engagement and student outcomes. Additionally, research could examine ways to strengthen social support networks to ensure that sexuality education is seen as a shared societal responsibility.

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