

# Preschool Teachers' Views and Practices About Sexual Development and Education: A Case Study\*

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to examine the views and practices of preschool teachers on sexual development and education. The research was carried out with a case study design, one of the qualitative research designs, and the data were collected in the spring term of the 2019-2020 academic year. The working group consisted of 10 preschool teachers with 5 years or more of professional experience working with 36-72-month-old children. A demographic information form, a semi-structured interview form, and a document review form were used to collect data. In the analysis of the research data, the descriptive analysis method was used for the interview data, and the content analysis method was employed in the document review form. According to the study results, preschool teachers did not have sufficient knowledge about the content of sexual education, children did not direct questions to their teachers about sexual development, and teachers did not encourage children to ask questions despite this situation. The study determined that only 28 of the 100 activity plans implemented by preschool teachers in the classroom included comprehensive sexual education topics.

**Keywords:** preschool teachers, preschool education, sexual development, sexual education, child development.

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## Introduction

The tenth article of the Declaration of Sexual Rights (1999) of the World Association for Sexual Health emphasizes that individuals have the right to obtain information about sexuality from birth. According to the report 'Standards for Sexual Education in Europe' (2010) of the World Health Organization Regional Office and Federal Center for Health Education (BZgA), sexual education consists of eight headings: human body and its development, fertility and reproduction, sexuality, emotions, lifestyle and relationships, sexual health and well-being, rights, and social-cultural determinants (values/norms) related to sexuality. In the SIECUS Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (2004), sexual education comprises six headings: human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health, society and culture, and many sub-dimensions. The general opinion about sexual education is that its objective is only to provide information about sexuality.

However, the stages of cognitive development, social-emotional development, language development, and motor development of our children are considered very important in early childhood, but the same sensitivity is not shown for sexual development. There are many reasons for this neglect. The first is that sexual education is not provided with the thought that reproduction will not occur in young children (Bulut, 2005). Another reason is that parents see their knowledge as insufficient, are ashamed to talk about the subjects included in sexual education (Ceylan and Çetin, 2015; Tuğrul and Artan, 2001; Tuzcuoğlu and Tuzcuoğlu, 1996; Göçgeldi, Tüzün, Türker, Şimşek, 2007; Eroğlu and Gölbaşı, 2004) and think that sexual education should be provided at older ages, such as high school years rather than at early ages (Tuğrul and Artan, 2001). Davies and Robinson (2010) stated that parents behaved avoidantly about providing education on sexual development to protect the child's innocence. In another study, the thought that prevents parents from giving sexual education to their children is that sexual education will lead the child to think in this area and cause confusion. However, sexual education delays the age of the first sexual experience rather than giving the child an idea about sexuality and creating a negative reflection (UNESCO, 2019). Meanwhile, sexual education is also important for fighting against abuse (Gündüz and Yıldız, 2016). Considering that development is a holistic phenomenon, sexual development should not be ignored. In this regard, although the primary role falls to parents while providing sexual education, early childhood teachers also take a significant place (Eser, 2008). Studies conducted with teachers on sexual education revealed that teachers supported sexual education but were hesitant to talk about sexual development and had inadequate knowledge about the subject (Yeşilay and Altun, 2009; Kardeş and Karaman, 2018; Güzelyurt, Yalçınkaya, Saluci, Öglü, Ürüm, 2019). The family and school, which are the child's first learning environments, should cooperate when sexual education is provided (Lu, 1994). Teachers should provide sexual education in line with the developmental characteristics of children. Considering the learning outcomes and indicators in the Preschool Curriculum (2013) of the Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Basic Education, no clear learning outcomes and indicators under the heading of sexual development were seen, as in

developmental domains such as cognitive development, social-emotional development, language development, self-care skills, and motor development. Upon examining the programs implemented abroad, it can be said that sexual education starts at an early age in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Greece, Korea, and some provinces of Canada, and there is comprehensive training that includes many subjects (European Parliament, 2013). Based on the program's flexibility, one of the main features of our country's Preschool Education Program, it gives information that the teacher can make some changes by considering individual differences between children and the environment. The subject of sexual development should not be left to curriculum flexibility, and necessary studies should be conducted in line with the learning outcomes and indicators related to sexual development. Sexual education has no age limit. In this sense, sexual education is not adequately addressed in the curricula implemented in Turkey (Çalışandemir, Bencik, Artan, 2010). In cases where some topics in sexual education are discussed, plant reproduction is discussed in the science and technology lesson in secondary school and the biology lesson in high school (Özcan, 2017). Although comprehensive sexual education is not included in the preschool education program, some subjects included in the content of sexual education are handled with the support of non-governmental organizations. The issue of sexual education should be carried out in a planned and programmed manner by the Ministry of National Education without leaving it to the initiative of institutions (Çalışandemir, Bencik, Artan, 2010). The literature shows that sexual education starts with birth and continues throughout life (SIECUS, 2004; Kentler and Pamir, 2008; Bayhan and Artan, 2005; Tuzcuoğlu and Tuzcuoğlu, 2004). Sexual education has no age limit. However, systematic and programmed sexual education is not given from preschool, which is the first formal education institution for children, until the end of university. The preschool period is very important in terms of children's sexual development. It is the period when children are highly curious about themselves and the opposite sex and often ask questions about these subjects. When Tuğrul and Artan (2001) reviewed questions about sexual subjects by age, the 4-6 age group was observed to ask questions the most. Not being able to satisfy the curiosity of children at this age, ignoring their questions, avoiding responding to them, or forbidding them to talk about these subjects may result in a deteriorated relationship between parents and children and may cause children to be directed to other sources, be exposed to images or information beyond their development, ask questions to an adult other than their parents, and face a bad event, even abuse if the person is malevolent. Sexual education that starts at an early age is also important in preventing adolescent pregnancies. According to the 2018 data on adolescent pregnancy (15-19 years) from the Turkey Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS), 4% of adolescents have children or are pregnant with their first children. According to the 2018 data from the Turkey Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS), 70% of women in the 15-19 age group do not apply the pregnancy prevention method. These results once again show the importance of sexual development and education. When the causes of adolescent pregnancies were reviewed, reasons such as culture, socio-economic level, and lack of knowledge came to the fore (Kahraman, 2009). Sexual education is important for protecting children from sexual abuse and effectively

preventing pregnancies at an early age. Concerning sexual abuse, the Ankara Bar Association Child Rights Center report states that 483 children were exposed to sexual abuse in the first three months of 2019 (Evrensel, 2019). Based on all these results, sexual education includes many subjects, from getting to know one's body to human relations. When studies in the field are reviewed, it is seen that the majority of them examine the attitudes and opinions of parents toward sexual development and education. Due to the low number of studies on sexual development and education, it is thought that this study will contribute to the literature, guide new research, and attract the attention of researchers to sexual development and sexual education. Answers to the following questions were sought in the study:

- What are preschool teachers' views on sexual development and education?
- What are preschool teachers' practices in the classroom within the scope of sexual development and education?

## Method

### Research Design

In this study, a case study design, one of the qualitative research designs, was used since it was aimed at determining the views and practices of preschool teachers on sexual development. A case study is a method in which an event or situation is examined in depth in its natural environment, data are collected, and the result is analyzed in line with the data. The results of case studies reveal why the examined event is in this situation and which points should be emphasized in future research. Case studies are more suitable for producing and revealing information than testing a situation or making assumptions (Davey, 2009). There is no sample represented in case studies as in experimental studies. The purpose of case studies is not to statistically generalize to the population but to create a theory or theoretical propositions and generalize to these propositions.

### Study Group

In the study, the snowball and criterion sampling methods, which are purposeful sampling methods, were used to determine the study group. In qualitative studies, there is no clear rule related to sample size. There are points to be considered when a sample size is determined in qualitative studies: the sample size should be large enough; this adequacy should not be measured by sample size but should be large enough to satisfy the researcher; and the study should involve a case-based sample small enough to be examined in depth. If cases are loaded with information, in-depth information can be obtained with very few samples (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005; Patton, 2014; Creswell, 2013). Since in-depth research is important in qualitative studies, there is no rule related to sample size (Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, 2006). In qualitative research, a detailed study can be carried out with a small sample group or a single sample (N=1) (Patton, 2014). In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 preschool teachers with 5 years

or more of professional experience, working with 36-72-month-old children, and participating in the study voluntarily.

While determining the criteria of the study group, teachers' professional experience of 5 years or more was set as a criterion because it was thought that, as teachers' years of professional experience increased, their probability of encountering issues related to sexual development and education also increased.

While determining the criterion for children's age, it was considered necessary to conduct research with children aged 36-72 months, which corresponds to the phallic period, since children are curious about their sexual organs and those of the opposite sex during the phallic period and ask questions about pregnancy, reproduction, differences of sexual organs, etc. (İnanç, Atıcı, Bilgin, 2007).

**Table1.**

*Demographic Information of the Participants*

Teacher Code	Gender	Education	Department	Professional Seniority	Status of Receiving Education
T1	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Preschool	9	No
T2	Female	Associate Degree	Child Development	7	No
T3	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Preschool	11	Yes
T4	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Preschool	15	Yes
T5	Female	Master's Degree	Preschool	9	No
T6	Female	Master's Degree	Preschool	10	Yes
T7	Female	Master's Degree	Preschool	8	Yes
T8	Female	Master's Degree	Preschool	13	No
T9	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Preschool	7	Yes
T10	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Preschool	17	Yes

As seen in Table 1, 10 teachers participated in the study. All teachers were female. Five teachers had bachelor's degrees, four had master's degrees, and one had an associate degree. Considering the departments the teachers graduated from, it is seen that 9 graduated from the preschool teaching department and 1 graduated from the child development department. Upon examining teachers' professional seniority, 6 had 7-10 years of professional seniority, and 4 had 11-17 years of professional seniority. When it is examined whether teachers received training on sexual development and education, it is found that six received training on sexual development and education and four did not.

## **Data Collection**

Research data were collected during the spring semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. The study used multiple data collection techniques to better describe the subject. Qualitative case studies should have diverse data to examine the subject in depth (Creswell, 2013). To describe the case in depth, a demographic information form, a semi-structured interview form, and a document review form were used to collect data from teachers. The researcher prepared questions in the demographic information form and the semi-structured interview form, and expert opinions were obtained during the preparation process. While preparing the document review form, the literature was reviewed, and various studies were benefited from (WHO, 2010; SIECUS, 2004). Expert opinions were obtained for the prepared document review form, and the form was finalized. The document review form was applied to all teachers interviewed, the daily plans of teachers were examined by randomly selecting two plans from each month for October, November, December, January, and February of the 2019-2020 academic year, and the status of including sexual education in education programs was revealed.

Prior to initiating the interview process, a pilot interview was held with a preschool teacher not included in the study group, and the interview form was finalized. After the interview form was finalized, the necessary legal permissions were received from the affiliated institute and the Ministry of National Education, and certain codes were used instead of the participants' names due to research ethics. A voice recorder was used with the participants' consent to prevent data loss during the interview.

## **Data Analysis**

The first stage in the research data analysis is the researcher's saving the notes during the interviews and transcribing audio records into the interview form. During this process, audio records were carefully listened to, and all the data was written down from the participants' statements without any change. After the research data were transcribed, randomly selected research data were given to another expert for examination. By giving the research data to another expert, it was aimed to minimize data loss during the listening and writing processes of the audio records and ensure the study's reliability. Examples of the plans implemented by teachers in the classroom were taken, examined using the document review form, and interpreted.

The descriptive analysis method was used to analyze the data obtained from the interview form. In the descriptive analysis method, data are summarized and interpreted according to the themes created. These themes are edited by considering some data that emerges before or during the research. In the descriptive analysis method, direct quotations are included without changing the data recorded during interviews or observation. The content analysis method was applied to examine the document review form, which is the second data collection tool of the study. Percentage and frequency were calculated to analyze the data obtained by checking the daily plans of preschool

teachers with the document review form. Subjecting the written data to certain processes and showing them in numbers via percentage and frequency calculation helps increase reliability, reduce bias, compare themes and categories, and restudy the results of the research with tools such as surveys by reaching a larger group later (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005).

## **Findings**

The research aimed to examine the views and practices of preschool teachers on sexual development and education, and the findings were presented under the headings of the two research sub-questions. The data obtained with the demographic information form, semi-structured interview form, and document review form were analyzed and supported by directly quoting the participants' views.

- Preschool teachers' views on sexual development and education,
- Preschool teachers' practices in the classroom within the scope of sexual development and education,

The data are presented under these two main questions of the research.

### **Findings Regarding Preschool Teachers' Views on Sexual Development and Education**

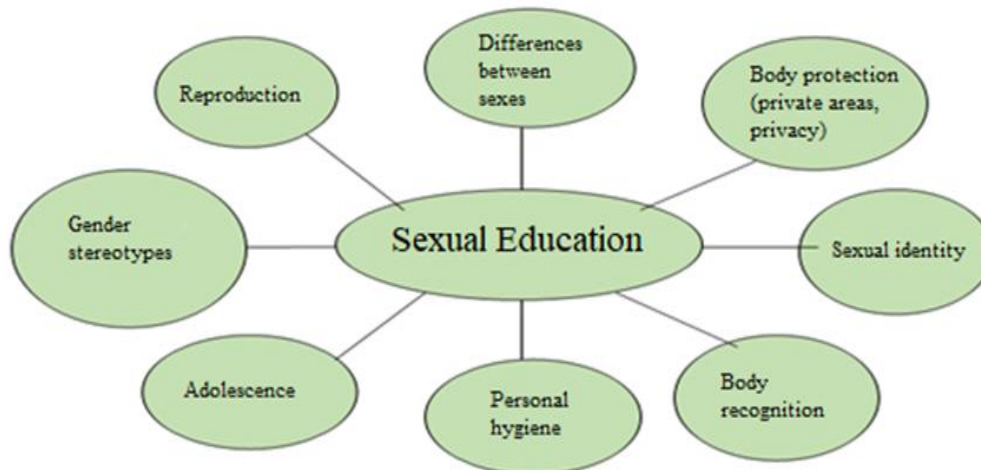
Teachers' views on sexual development and education are examined in depth under many headings.

### **Findings Regarding Teachers' Views on the Content of Sexual Education in the Preschool Period**

In this study, which examined the views and practices of preschool teachers on sexual development and education, the research findings are presented under certain themes. The first of these themes is teachers' views on the content of sexual education. Figure 1 shows teachers' views on the content of sexual education.

Figure 1.

Teachers' Answers Regarding Sexual Education Content in the Preschool Period



As seen in Figure 1, when teachers' statements about the subjects included in sexual education in the preschool period are examined, it is seen that they mentioned differences between sexes, body protection, sexual identity, body recognition, personal hygiene, adolescence, gender stereotypes, and reproduction. Examples of raw data for these sub-themes are given below.

The vast majority of the teachers expressed that sexual education included differences between sexes, body protection, sexual identity, and body recognition, and subjects such as personal hygiene, adolescence, gender stereotypes, and reproduction were included in sexual development and education. T4 expressed her view as follows.

*T4: "... Children see and learn somehow while they are changing. We teach the aspects of being a girl or a boy and the differences here. We have activities related to getting to know ourselves, and we do these activities. But we do not teach like, "This is the female organ or male organ;" we teach the differences about ourselves, about being a girl, for example. As you know, it is now important to teach body protection because sexual abuse cases have increased significantly. So, we also have activities related to this issue."*

When the statement of T4 is reviewed, she emphasized that children became aware of differences between sexes by observing their environment; these differences were not taught anatomically at school, but only the male and female appearances in society were discussed, and the subject of body protection was addressed.

*T6: "... We start with the body, introducing the body to children. It does not have sexual content so much, but I include sexual content in the subject in preschool. When I started my profession, sexual abuse cases were not so common. But later, I learned how common they became by reading different sources, such as social media or the internet. This substantially affected me. I read one or two books on this matter, although I do not remember the authors right now. Considering these*



*books, I have been trying to do activities such as showing videos or images through which children can get to know their private areas since these cases were revealed..."*

When the statements of T6 were reviewed, she also taught body recognition, and as T4 stated, she did activities related to body protection in preschool due to the cases occurring in society.

*T7: "... We don't know if we are very efficient, but we cannot teach every subject. We first talk about body and sex as girls and boys, then we talk about the private areas of girls and private areas of boys, who can see them and who cannot see them. We first introduce them verbally. Oh, I also do experiments regarding toilet hygiene in toilet training that week. We start with self-care, then we watch slides titled sexes, body recognition, differences between sexes, and do not touch my private areas, respectively. We cannot show images because it is preschool; they may arouse curiosity. Children may want to look at their friends' private areas, etc. Therefore, no images are needed to prevent these situations. But as girls grow up, their breasts may also grow. We also say to boys that these are the parts from which we usually pee. We cannot give their names. Their size also increases. But it is different for girls and boys. We twist the subject a bit. We try to address this subject in between discussions without drawing children's attention to it. The reason for me to do so is that children may be curious to open and look..."*

When the statement of T7 is reviewed, it is seen that she included subjects such as body recognition, private areas, personal hygiene, and differences between sexes and mentioned adolescence by providing information about changes that would occur in organs as people grew up, unlike other participants. She stated that she did not use images to arouse curiosity in children.

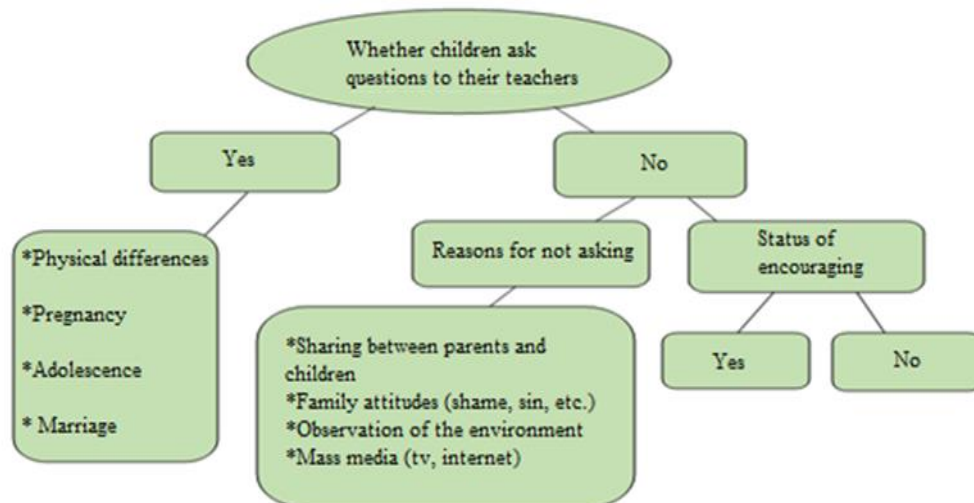
As sub-themes of sexual development, teachers defined differences between sexes, body protection, sexual identity, body recognition, personal hygiene, adolescence, and gender stereotypes.

### **Findings Regarding the Status of Children Asking Their Teachers About Sexuality, Themes of Questions They Asked, Reasons for Not Asking Questions, and Encouragement of Teachers Despite Not Asking Questions**

Figure 2 shows children's ways of asking their teachers about sexuality, the themes of the questions they ask, the reasons for not asking questions, and teachers' encouragement for not asking questions.

Figure 2.

Findings Concerning Children's Asking Their Teachers Questions About Sexuality



As seen in Figure 2, when it was examined whether children asked questions to their teachers about sexual development, teachers stated that most of the children did not ask questions. However, when the reasons why children did not ask questions to their teachers were reviewed, teachers expressed that children shared these curiosities with their parents; they thought that it would be a shame or a sin to ask questions about sexual development due to the attitudes of their families; they did not feel the need to ask questions because they satisfied their curiosity through observation and mass media. On the other hand, when all the answers given by teachers were examined, the majority stated that the reason why children did not ask their teachers questions about sexual development was the sharing between parents and children and family attitudes.

T6: "I wonder if children satisfy their curiosity in other directions now. They see visuals on their phones or computers ... maybe due to their attitudes or unawareness. Children talk among themselves and do not ask the teacher. They code it as a shame in their minds. They actually know their environment. This is what I call family attitude..."

T8: "Do families tell children that this is a shame? They may see it as a shame."

The vast majority of the teachers reported that children did not ask questions about sexual development, and it was examined whether teachers encouraged children to ask questions. Upon reviewing whether teachers encouraged children to ask questions, the majority stated that they expected children to ask questions, and a small number of teachers said they encouraged children to ask questions about their sexual development.

T8: "I expect questions from them because I think they will ask when the time comes. So, I think there is no need to introduce this subject. I believe it is early now."

T9: "... I try to answer if they ask me questions, but I do not encourage them to think about it. There is no special reason, but I do not have a document about this. I do not have a document through which I can teach this subject. I also do not know how to include such a subject in my plan. I do not know how to teach this as part of my plan. Therefore, I do not encourage them at all. I just try to answer if they ask me questions."

When the teachers' statements were reviewed, they emphasized that they would arouse children's curiosity when they encouraged them to ask questions, they had inadequate knowledge about how to give explanations to children's questions and how to teach this subject; and they did not have any documents that would complete their knowledge. T10, on the other hand, emphasized that teachers encouraged children to ask questions, and parents' possible reactions were among the reasons preventing teachers from encouraging children to ask questions.

T10: "... We do not know how to ask questions as a society. We are trained not to ask questions. Actually, I try to make them ask questions. We cannot know the reaction of parents here. Teachers hesitate..."

When it was examined whether children asked their teachers questions about sexual development, only a few teachers stated that they were asked questions about sexual development.

The children's questions were about physical differences, pregnancy, adolescence, and marriage. However, considering all the questions, teachers emphasized that children asked questions about physical differences between sexes and pregnancy.

T2: "Why is my organ different from the male organ?"

T2: "How did I come here?"

T9: "Did they find us from the hospital? ...", "Teacher, we are not brought by storks, as in tales, are we?"

Concerning children's questions, they mostly asked questions about how they came into the world and the differences between sexes, whereas the other two subjects they asked about were adolescence and marriage.

T7. "Will our breasts not grow?... Teacher, you called us preadolescents. What does preadolescent mean?"

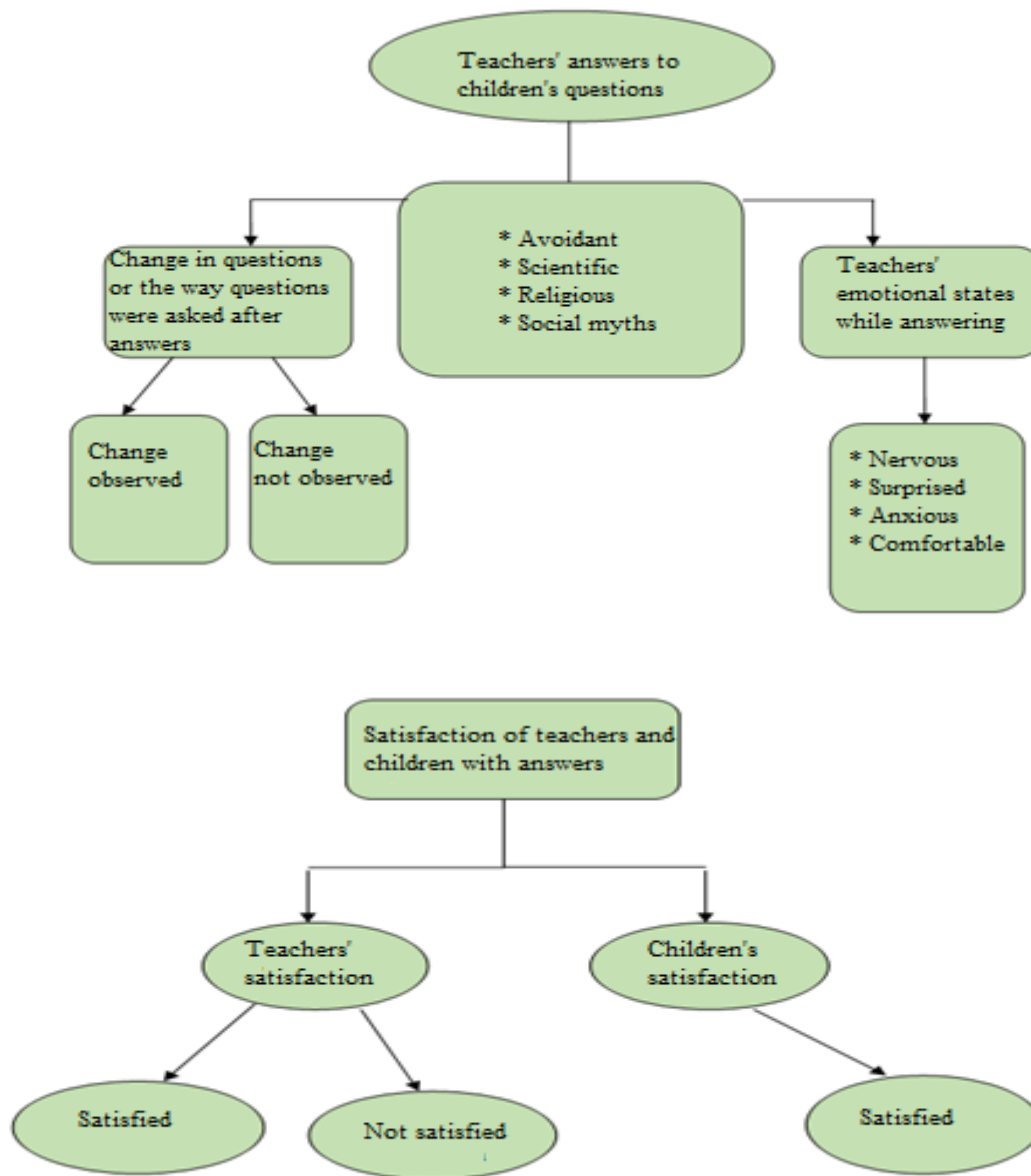
T10. "Teacher, would two girls marry a boy?"

### **Findings Regarding Teachers' Answers to Children's Questions about Sexual Development**

Figure 3 presents the findings regarding teachers' answers to children's questions about sexual development.

Figure 3.

Findings Regarding Teachers' Answers to Children's Questions About Sexual Development



As seen in Figure 3, when teachers' answers to children's questions about sexual development are reviewed, it is seen that most teachers gave avoidant and scientific answers, but a group of teachers gave answers based on religious beliefs and social myths.

T2: "... I explain, but not so deeply. I do not answer questions instantly. First, I gather it in my head. In such cases, I usually tell them I will not answer their questions immediately but later. I also wonder if this approach is a bit wrong..."

T7: "Many of them ask why they were not born as a girl or a boy. It is even difficult for me to explain it. It is impossible to teach them Allah as a concept. It is too abstract. Why a girl, why a boy? I cannot answer. We cannot answer every question. We drop the subject with small avoidance methods (your reason for avoiding?). Maybe not to confuse them. Because we cannot determine why it's a boy or a girl.. Our creator, Allah, decides on it. This can be the reason for my hesitance. Such things are not given much importance in this locality. Also, it is too abstract; they may get confused..."

Teachers stated that they exhibited an avoidant attitude toward questions about sexual development, they did not answer questions immediately, and the reason for this was their inadequate knowledge. However, another teacher said that they were avoidant in the face of questions about sexual development since they hesitated that giving explanations to children's questions would arouse more curiosity in them.

T7: "...I do as follows: 'Yes, children, our sexual organs grow in adulthood, that is, as we get older.' Frankly, I do not say 'sexual,' but 'some of our organs may grow.' I give examples like 'children cannot walk initially, but they can over time. This is how I explain it. 'Our heights are short, but we get taller slowly.' We introduce it, saying first, "Children are born with breasts,' as is shown to them, then, "Breasts slowly grow in girls, and lower organs slowly grow in boys,' etc. I hope I could explain it."

T7 gave avoidant answers to some questions, as stated above, whereas she explained some questions by presenting growth- and development-related scientific examples.

Upon examining whether teachers observed any change in children's questions or the way they asked questions after their answers to children's questions about sexual development, one teacher who stated that she was asked questions left this question without an answer, and most teachers observed changes after their answers to the said questions.

T7: "... We did an experiment on hygiene. Two balloons were inflated, cleaned, and stuck at the back. It's a very nice experiment, I loved it. After this experiment, reinforcement of the subject was continued with children's questions..."

T10: "... Our children do not know how to ask questions so much. When you tell them to ask, they tell their stories — daily stories that affected them and remained in their minds. They ask questions very rarely or talk about a situation they have experienced. We understand they have a question mark somewhere, and explain it to them. Yes, when we make such explanations, they change and start to think further because they have learned that they grew up in their mothers' wombs and were taken out by a doctor. Then they start questioning everything. What did they do when they were in their mothers' wombs?..."

On the other hand, when teachers' answers to questions about how they felt while answering children's questions about sexual development were examined, feelings of anxiety and surprise predominated.

*T2: "When there are questions difficult to answer, like right now, such as how I was born, of course, people are a little surprised. I did not know what to do at that moment."*

*T7: "I get nervous at first ... Really. For example, when a child asks such questions, I immediately say, 'Yes, my son. Wait for a second. I will answer your question during Free or Turkish Language Activities.' I quickly check on the phone, trying to simplify it. We have difficulty with some children, it is true."*

When the emotional states of the teachers who answered children's questions were questioned, they were found to experience feelings of surprise, tension, and anxiety. Teachers' inadequate knowledge to answer questions, their need for time to answer questions, and their carefulness in giving as much necessary information as possible while informing children come to the fore as the reasons why they experienced these feelings. However, one of the teachers, T10, emphasized that she felt comfortable with children's questions about sexual development.

*T10: "I do not feel uncomfortable at all. It is natural. Why would I be worried? I do not think whether a parent will react at me because this is its scientific explanation; all scientific books say that this is the method to use for explanation..."*

It was examined how teachers felt while answering children's questions about sexual development and what they thought about the satisfaction of children and teachers with answers. T2 explained this situation as follows.

*T2: "I think children were satisfied. No similar questions were asked later. Perhaps, I could have explained it more deeply."*

One of the teachers, T2, who participated in the study, did not consider her answer adequate, but T9 considered her answer adequate.

*T9: "I found it adequate, actually. I don't know how to explain it further, but I can say so. I have already given a very clear answer. If the child does not get an adequate answer, he/she does not leave you or repeats it. He/she realizes on that day that you are trying to avoid it. He/she then repeat it or asks it of someone else. So, I think it was adequate."*

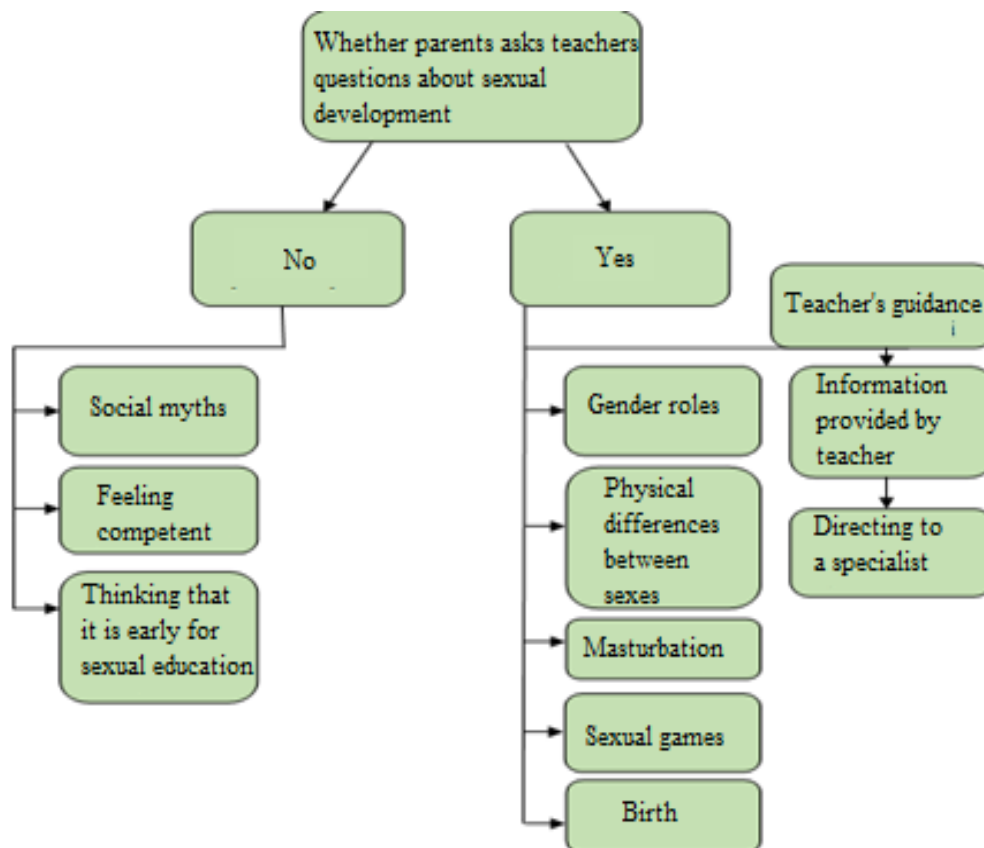
When the satisfaction of teachers and children with answers was investigated, some teachers found their answers satisfying for children. However, when their statements about their own satisfaction were examined, some teachers were satisfied with their own answers, while others were not.

### **Findings Regarding Parents' Questions to Teachers About Sexual Development**

Findings regarding parents' questions to teachers about sexual development are given in Figure 4.

Figure 4.

Findings Regarding Parents' Questions to Teachers About Sexual Development



As seen in Figure 4, when teachers' encounters with parents' questions about sexual development were examined, teachers stated that some parents asked questions of teachers while others did not. The issues about which parents who asked questions to teachers consulted teachers and the reasons why parents who did not ask questions did not consult teachers were investigated.

Upon examining the questions directed to teachers by parents, it was revealed that they asked questions about gender roles, physical differences between sexes, masturbation, sexual games, and childbirth. When it was investigated how teachers guided parents when they encountered such questions, they were found to often make suggestions to families relying on their knowledge.

T2: "A (boy's) parent asked me what she was supposed to do because her son liked the pink color and played with dolls. I said, 'You do whatever he wants, you should not... You should tell him all colors are nice. This is what I do in the classroom.'"

T7: "... D's mother asked, 'He masturbates near his sister. When the sister is not there, then he does not.' I said he might have associated it with his brother and discovered it through him. But he

*should not be interfered with. Such questions about masturbation are directed. I tried to explain whatever I knew."*

Upon reviewing the answers and guidance of teachers, they were seen to inform and provide guidance regarding the issue within their knowledge, whereas a teacher emphasized that she did not have adequate knowledge about sexual development. She gave recommendations to the family to alleviate their concerns, but she suggested they consult a specialist for the issue.

*T6: "... I am scared of misguiding in case of big problems. I took only one counseling course on this subject, and I think it was inadequate. I tried to calm a parent, saying, 'This is not something to fear. Children are curious. These are developmental characteristics. You think only you are experiencing it because you see it. But they all do it. I hear it. Parents do not share, but everyone must be experiencing it.' I tried to calm the parent myself, but a specialist would be more helpful later..."*

Some teachers said that parents did not ask questions about sexual development. Teachers thought they were not asked questions because parents felt they had adequate knowledge about the issue; it was considered a shame or a sin, based on social myths, to discuss these subjects; they hesitated or thought that the preschool period was an early period for sexual development and education.

*T4: "... For example, we cannot do much about child masturbation. We do not know how to tell the parent or what kind of reaction we will get. In the same way, parents hesitate, feel embarrassed, and do not want to embarrass their children against their friends or teachers. These things are generally not so clear. Training is given, but there is no participation. Even attending a seminar raises the question, 'Does this parent's child have a problem? Why did he/she come to the seminar?'.*

*T5: "...As I said, parents are a little more conscious when they face such a situation. They use the internet and read child development books. So, they may try to handle it themselves."*

*T8: "They may not come because they think it is a shame, a sin, and too early."*

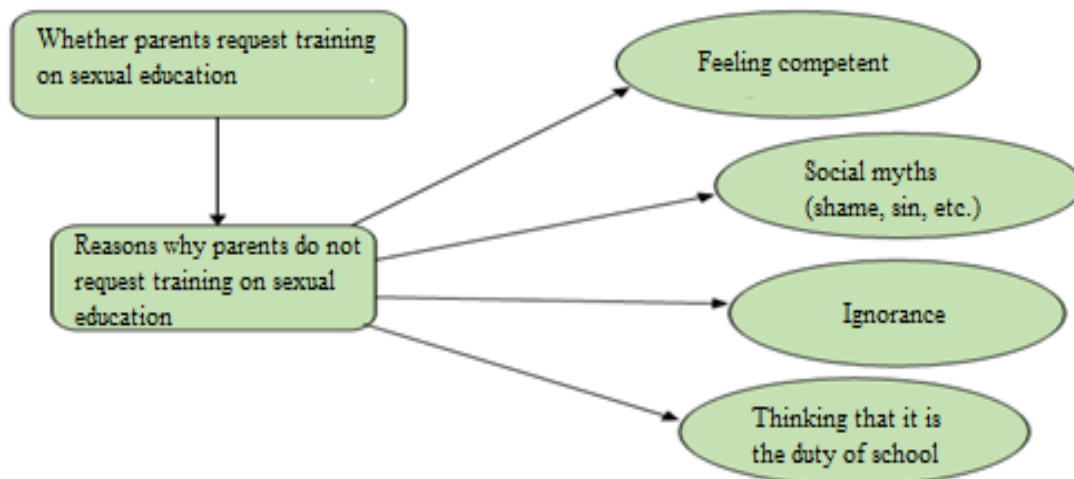
### **Findings Regarding Whether Parents Request Training on Sexual Education for Their Children and Themselves**

Figure 5 presents findings regarding whether parents request training on sexual education for their children and themselves.



Figure 5.

*Findings Regarding Whether Parents Request Training on Sexual Education for Their Children and Themselves*



As seen in Figure 5, upon reviewing whether parents requested training on sexual development and education for themselves or their children, all teachers participating in the study stated that they did not encounter any requests for training from parents on this subject. Teachers emphasized that parents usually considered themselves competent in sexual development and education, they thought that this issue was a shame, a sin based on social myths, they ignored the subject of sexual development and education; and they might see training on this subject as the duty of the school. These were the reasons why parents did not request training on sexual development and education.

T7: "They know more than us; we studied in vain. For example, every month, some training is given at our school, but they do not participate. In the whole school, we are four hundred and fifty-five, five hundred people; I guess four hundred and twenty. We are very crowded. Only twenty-five people participate. So, the rate is very low..."

T8: "... Maybe they think it is not so necessary. I find the internet very effective. They may be thinking that they already learned a lot from it..."

T8: "I will say what I've just said, I think. They may think it is a little early, or it is a shame because some of my students' parents have low levels of education. But parents with good levels of education also do not have any requests. They may hesitate. I think it is cultural. They may have a traditional mindset. I guess they find it early..."

After teachers stated that they did not receive any requests for training on sexual development and education from parents, it was examined on which subjects parents requested training. Concerning the subjects on which parents requested training, teachers stated that parents requested training on issues such as academic skills, self-

care skills, social-emotional skills, behavioral problems, the use of technology, effective book reading, and toy preference.

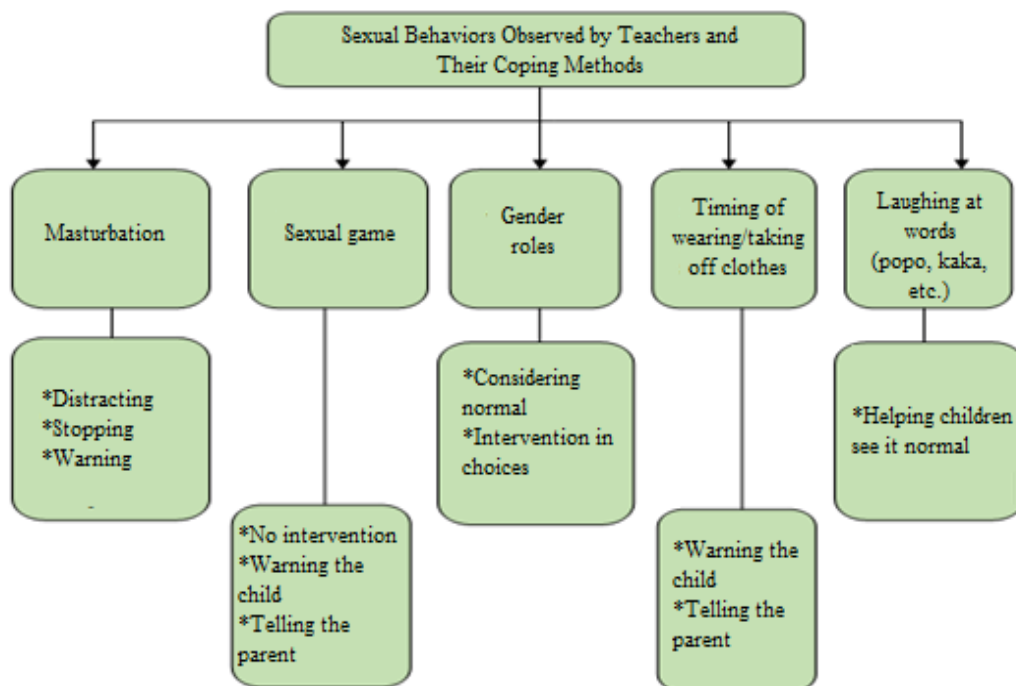
T1: "...They generally focus on speaking, social behavior, friends, rules, self-care skills, and sharing. So, they usually consult, thinking, 'My child should be raised as a good individual.' I have never provided counseling on sexual development. I rather address a child's sociability, being hardworking, doing everything, holding scissors, writing, which parents also focus on..."

### Findings Regarding the Sexual Behaviors Observed by Teachers in the Classroom and Their Coping Methods

Figure 6 shows the findings regarding the sexual behaviors observed by teachers in the classroom and their coping methods.

Figure 6.

Findings Regarding the Sexual Behaviors Observed By Teachers in the Classroom and Their Coping Methods



As seen in Figure 6, when teachers were asked what behaviors related to sexual development they observed in the classroom, they said that they often encountered behaviors related to masturbation, sexual games and gender roles, in addition to behaviors such as the timing of wearing/taking off clothes and laughing at some words (popo (butt), kaka (poop), etc.) among children. It was also examined how teachers coped with the behaviors they encountered.

When the coping methods of the teachers, who stated that they encountered masturbation behavior in their classrooms, were examined, they often preferred to distract, warn, and stop the child during masturbation.

*T10: "...He was never stopping; he was sweating a lot. The chair was constantly shaking, and other children were trying to understand and imitate what he was doing. For example, I never did chair activities. When he sat on the floor, he would try to do it by putting his hand there. We were always moving. As soon as the child started, I would say, 'I am bored a lot, let's go from here.' By doing this, I also wanted to prevent others from looking at and imitating him..."*

*T6: "I drew the child's attention in some other direction, without embarrassing the child or saying, 'What are you doing? Don't do it! It's very wrong.' I tried not to draw other children's attention. Instead, I said, 'Let's play the clapping game.' We use our hands a lot in finger games. We count numbers, etc. I tried to draw the child's attention to such a game."*

*T7: "... I did not know what to do when I started teaching. The child would prepare a setup under the table. He had been dismissed from three kindergartens before. He would masturbate on the set. Normally, we should not interrupt him for a while. But I could not let his classmates see him. I had to stop him. Whenever I held him, he would be in a fit of crying..."*

*T9: "... I mean, he plays with his sexual organ. He even goes out, but there is no one there. He plays with it for a while. He then washes his hands and comes back. I said once, 'When our toilet procedure is complete, we close up and come back to the classroom..."*

When the coping methods of the teachers, who stated that they encountered the behavior of playing sexual games in their classrooms, were examined, they expressed that they usually considered these games normal and did not intervene. However, they used methods such as warning the child and informing the parents about the situation.

*T6: "...I have experienced these behaviors over the last two years. For example, children put stuff on their bellies and say they are pregnant and will give birth. When I first saw this last year, I became worried. These kinds of things worry adults. But later, I told myself, this is something like a child's imitation of kitchen play or putting a baby to sleep. I did not intervene so much, and I saw it as normal..."*

When the coping methods of the teachers who mentioned encountering gender role games in their classrooms were examined, they stated that they usually considered these games normal and did not intervene. However, a teacher resorted to methods such as intervening in the situation.

*T6: "... But if you enter my classroom right now, boys will cook and offer me food, invite me to visit, or girls will play the game of parking in the garage. There are no such things, but if you look at it in percentage, girls prefer to play with girls, and boys prefer to play with boys. It is quite normal. I react similarly to both boys and girls because I believe in equality of roles in real life..."*

When the coping methods of the teachers who mentioned encountering children's wearing/taking off their clothes in the classroom were reviewed, they stated that they frequently resorted to methods such as warning the child about the issue and sharing it with the parent.

*T6: "...For example, if the child needed to go to the toilet, he/she started taking off the trousers in the classroom. I had to talk to and warn him/her a couple of times. I do not know if this is included,*

*but I think so. Although I had mentioned private areas in the classroom before, I needed to give explanations a couple of times, such as 'M, your friends are in the classroom. We learned about our private areas before. It is not right for anyone to see it, even me. Your parents may see them when they are giving you a shower or when you are changing your clothes at home. But strangers should not. These are our private areas. You should go to the toilet and take off your pants there. When you close your door...'*

*T2: "I took the naked child who came from the toilet out of the classroom immediately. Other children were laughing, they thought he/she was being funny. But the other one did not know it. I talked to the child outside. 'We need to wear our trousers in the toilet. The child told me that others were laughing. I said that it was not funny. Then, I talked to the child's mother. The child used to do it to his/her brother as well. I think family attitude is quite important..."*

When the coping methods of the teachers who said that they encountered laughing behavior when children heard words such as popo (butt), kaka (poop), etc. in their classrooms were examined, they expressed that they tried to normalize these words to avoid reactions by saying, 'These are parts of the body just like arms, legs, etc. and parts of the body are not laughed at.'

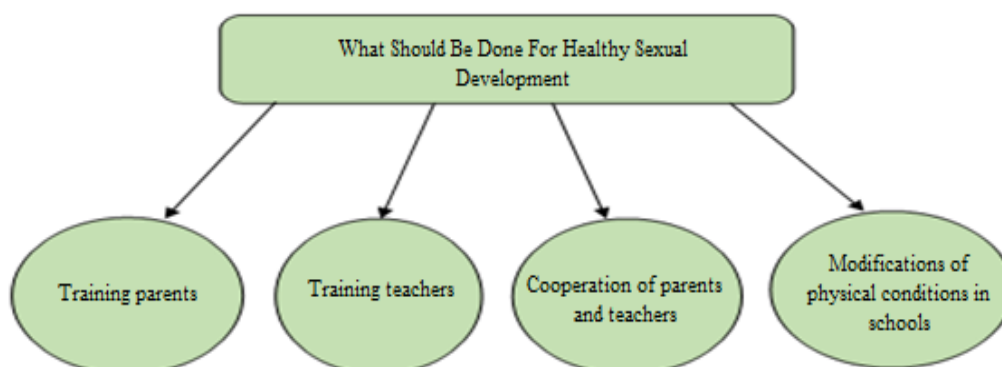
*T10: "...Maybe. Do we get surprised when we say, 'my arm'? When 'popo' is uttered, children start laughing. They exaggerate it. I stay calm without doing anything. First, I give them two minutes for their fun. Then, I say, 'I will say something. Arm!' They look at my face. 'Cheek!' They again look at me. I ask, 'Why don't you laugh?' The arm is a part of our body, as are the cheeks and nose. Same way, 'popo' is a part of the body..."*

### Findings Regarding the Regulations that Teachers Think Should Be Made for The Healthy Sexual Development of Children

The findings regarding the regulations that teachers think should be made for the healthy sexual development of children are given in Figure 7.

Figure 7.

*Findings Regarding the Regulations That Teachers Think Should Be Made for Healthy Sexual Development of Children*



As seen in Figure 7, when the teachers were asked about what should be done for children's healthy sexual development, they first mentioned that parents should receive training on sexual development and education, teachers should also receive training on sexual development and education, parents and teachers should cooperate within the scope of sexual development and education, toilets should not be separate so that schools can contribute to children's sexual development and education; thus, a natural learning environment would be provided to children, contributing to their sexual development.

*T9: "The school can organize training for families about this, but we can also receive more detailed training. That is, we can receive training about what we teach and what we don't because we don't really have so much information about it. Everyone gives sexual education in their own way or answers questions without encouraging children as much as I do. We frankly don't know how to guide children as teachers. We can also be guided about how to educate them more."*

*T5: "...It is not only our responsibility to help the child discover his/her identity. The family also plays a big role. If the parent is conscious and communicates with the child in this way, it will, of course, be useful."*

*T3: "... I thought that girls' and boys' toilets should not be separate and should have no doors because the child cannot see a different organ if he/she does not have a sibling or cousin. We thought they should see each other and learn..." "*

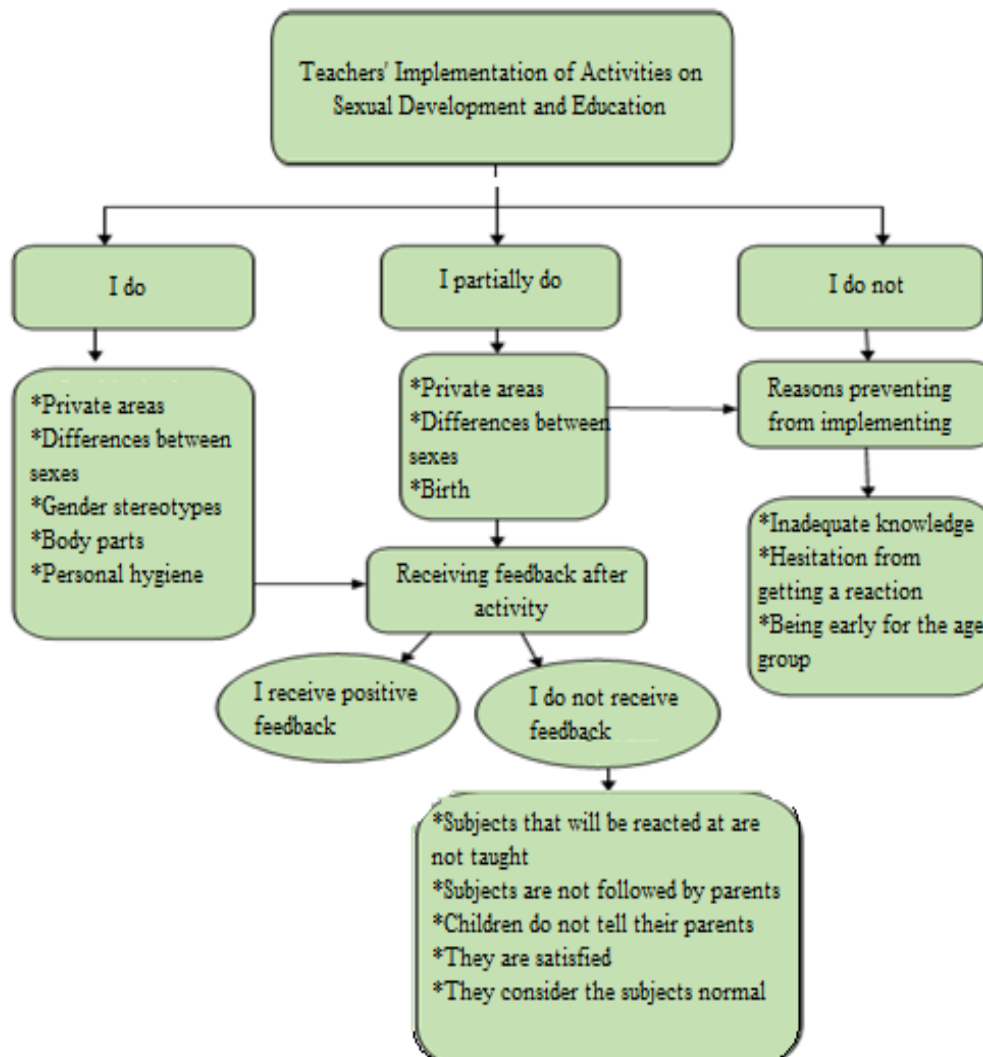
### **Findings Regarding Preschool Teachers' Practices in the Classroom Within the Scope of Sexual Development and Education**

The situations in which teachers practice activities regarding sexual development and education in the classroom and, if they are doing these types of activities, what topics these activities contain, were examined.

Findings regarding teachers' implementation of activities in their classrooms within the scope of sexual development and education are presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8.

Findings Regarding Teachers' Implementation of Activities in Their Classrooms Within the Scope of Sexual Development and Education



As seen in Figure 8, when teachers' implementation of activities for sexual development and education of children in their classrooms was reviewed, many expressed that they partially implemented activities, whereas some stated that they implemented activities and others did not. When the reasons that prevented teachers who partially implemented and did not implement activities from implementing activities on sexual development and education were examined, teachers stated that they did not implement any activities since they did not have adequate knowledge about sexual development and education, they were afraid of getting reactions from parents, and the preschool

period might be an early age group for sexual development and education. On the other hand, a group of preschool teachers reported that they implemented activities on sexual development and education in their classrooms. When the activities implemented by teachers to support the sexual development of children in their classrooms were examined, teachers emphasized that they implemented activities on subjects such as private areas, differences between sexes, gender stereotypes, body parts, and personal hygiene. When it was investigated whether teachers who stated that they implemented or partially implemented activities in their classrooms received any feedback from parents or children after or during these activities, most expressed that they did not receive any feedback and thought this was because they did not address the subjects they would get a reaction for, families did not follow the subjects taught in the class, children did not tell their parents about the subjects taught in the class, families were pleased with the subjects taught, and they found the teaching of these subjects normal.

When teachers' implementation of activities on sexual development and education in the classroom was examined, most teachers said they partially implemented activities.

*T3: "We only say, 'Strangers should not touch you; your body is your privacy.' Other than this, the difference between girls and boys and the difference between their organs are not mentioned. The difference in hair and clothes is shown, nothing else..."*

*T4: "As I said, physical characteristics such as hairstyles of girls and boys, not sexual organs. We don't show them fully. We open slides, but we don't say, 'Look, this is a male organ, this is a female organ.' I have never shown things like this. In general terms, as I said, 'Girls have long hair, and boys have short hair. Girls wear skirts, and boys wear trousers.' Such things. We have slides, videos, and cartoons. Things at their levels."*

*T10: "As I said, I did not do a specific something. In general, 'My Body' is taught in the first months. We do things about it. But we have stories about how children are born. If I remember correctly, there was a book on this subject in an educational series. By reading that book, I answer the question marks in children's minds up to a certain level. But I do not have a systematic plan to address this subject comprehensively..."*

When the reasons preventing teachers who partially implemented and did not implement activities on sexual development and education in their classrooms from implementing activities on sexual development and education were investigated, teachers stated that they did not implement activities since they did not have adequate knowledge about sexual development and education, they were afraid of getting reactions from parents, and the preschool period might be an early age group for sexual development and education.

*T2: "In fact, I think I have shortcomings. I never explain it in depth, always superficially... I have never discussed sexual subjects. I have not done this because I have not received any reactions from children either. These are somewhat explained at the age of six. I usually deal with children aged three to five years."*

*T4: "As I said, I sometimes think about this. After children go home and tell their parents, parents may say, 'Why did you tell my child about this? I would not tell my child about it right now.' For example, some parents do not want their children to change their clothes near them, even when they have vests on them..."*

T10: "... When you ask me now, I actually never needed to do something like that. As I said, maybe because I have never considered myself competent. To teach something, one needs to know it very well to be able to explain it. I frankly don't think I am competent on this issue. Yes, I explain, and I am more competent than many other teachers. I can bring the discussion to an end properly, but with help. No, I seriously need training..."

The teachers who said that they did not implement activities on sexual development and education in their classrooms emphasized that they did not implement activities because they did not have adequate knowledge and it was an early age for sexual education.

T8: "... I think this is early, but maybe it is wrong. I will go home now and look through academic articles..."

T9: "I think I don't discuss it because I do not know what and how I should discuss it. If subjects to address are specified, activities will also be implemented in this area of development."

When the subjects addressed by the teachers who stated that they implemented activities on sexual development and education in their classrooms were examined, the most addressed subject was private areas and differences between sexes, whereas gender stereotypes, body parts, and personal hygiene were also discussed.

T5: "...Some children can get confused even when we ask, 'Are you a girl or a boy?'. For some children, we first focus on the concept of girl-boy. Then, we question the differences between girls and boys. First, the question-answer method is followed. Then, an art activity can be implemented. Or drama, reading, and writing activities in the classroom. In this way, we include them in our activities. Concerning private areas, we follow the question-answer method. Afterward, we turn it into a bit of drama.. Other than that, we implement an art activity. We talk. Who can touch, and who cannot? What are our private areas? We act it out."

T6: "...Generally, there are girl and boy images. I give girl images to girls and boy images to boys. They complete them and paint them with materials. There are also various facial cards. This way, I also include emotions. Sometimes, they find it by gender. But I try to avoid matching like pink for girls and blue for boys. I even encourage myself. I like all colors. All colors are for all of us. I may colors, like pink a lot, but it is not right if I insist on it. I try not to separate... There are also activities for the whole body because I introduce all body parts. Within the scope of the subject 'Our Body,' there are also regional activities. In private areas, I implement activities once or twice a year. Others are activities such as 'Getting to Know Our Internal Organs,' 'Learning Their Functions,' 'I am Getting to Know My Sense Organs,' etc. There are no images of sexual organs, but they are mentioned verbally."

T7: "Every year, I do that toilet cleaning experiment, and I benefit from images from EBA (Education Information Network). It has nice activities. There are 'Don't Touch My Private Areas' activities on YouTube. The subject, 'Our Body' takes two to three weeks. We often address our bodies there with pictures. But I make the children put craft paper on the floor. Children first make a human body. Then, it turns into an art activity in the form of 'don't touch my private areas.' It is a nice activity..."

When it was examined whether the teachers who stated that they implemented or partially implemented activities on sexual development and education in their classrooms received any feedback, they often stated that they did not receive any feedback, whereas a group of teachers received positive feedback.



T2: "...Parents, on the other hand, said, 'You taught private areas. My child now explains at home that he/she has private areas. Thank you.'"

T10: "Yes, some parents say their children learned it very well, and they used to think about how to teach their children. This is nice, positive feedback..."

Upon examining whether the teachers who stated that they implemented or partially implemented activities on sexual development and education in their classrooms received any feedback, they stated that they often did not receive any feedback. When the possible reasons were investigated, teachers reported that they did not receive feedback because subjects to which parents might react were not taught, parents did not follow subjects, children did not tell their parents about what they learned, parents were pleased with activities, and they considered them normal.

T3: "The children may not have mentioned it, or the teacher may have explained it. We have not discussed anything that would be reacted at."

T7: "... I mean, parents were prejudiced this year. But I think they are pleased with the education. So, they don't say anything..."

T8: "No, I haven't received any. Maybe parents are not following."

T9: "I have not received any feedback, actually. They may have considered it normal."

### **Findings Regarding Preschool Teachers' Inclusion of Sexual Development and Education in Their Activity Plans**

One hundred daily education plans from 10 preschool teachers participating in the study were examined. For each teacher, two plans from each month for October, November, December, January, and February of the 2019-2020 academic year were selected randomly. Plans were examined by considering the comprehensive sexual education subjects in various sources, and findings regarding teachers' inclusion of sexual education subjects in education programs were reached.

**Table 2.**

*Data on Teachers' Inclusion of Sexual Education in Their Daily Plans, Types of Activities, Subjects, and Learning Outcomes*

Codes	f	%	Activity Types	f	%	Subjects	f	%	Learning Outcomes		
									f	%	
Those including sexual education	28	28	Turkish	18	26.47	Body image	9	30	SED/1	3	12
			Art	11	16.17	Friendship	7	23.33	SED/3	2	8
			Music	9	13.23	Values	4	13.33	SED/5	2	8
Those not including sexual education	72	72	Play	9	13.23	Sexual anatomy and physiology	3	10	SED/6	3	12
			Reading /Writing	7	10.29	Reproductive health	3	10	SED/8	12	48
			Drama	7	10.29	Family	2	6.66	SED/10	0	0
			Science	5	7.35	Gender roles	1	3.33	SED/5	0	0
			Mathematic	1	1.47				SED/6	1	4
			Movement	1	1.47	Communication	1	3.33	OBB/1	1	4
									OBB/7		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>25</b>	<b>100</b>

One hundred daily education plans of teachers, randomly selected as two plans from each month for October, November, December, January, and February, were reviewed. Twenty-eight out of 100 plans included sexual education subjects. It was examined using which types of activities the teachers who included sexual education subjects in their daily education plans taught these subjects, and sexual education activities were presented with Turkish (26.47%), art (16.17%), and music (13.23%) activities, whereas the subjects were introduced with science (7.35%), mathematics and movement (1.47%) activities at least.

As seen in Table 2, when teachers' sexual education practices are examined, 8 out of 24 main subjects were addressed. In their activities, teachers often discuss the themes of body image (30%), friendship (23.33%), values (13.33%), and the family (6.66%), gender roles (3.33%), and communication (3.33%) at least. Regarding the achievements that teachers considered while giving their sexual development and education, 10 achievements that might be related to sexual development and education were selected from among the achievements of the Ministry of National Education's General Directorate of Basic Education Pre-School Education Program (2013). The status of including these achievements in the activity plans on sexual education topics was also examined. Accordingly, in the activity plans that might be related to sexual development and education, Social-Emotional Development/Learning Outcome 8: Respects differences (48%), Social-Emotional Development/Learning Outcome 1: Introduces

his/her characteristics (12%), Social-Emotional Development/Learning Outcome 6: Protects his/her and others' rights (12%) were included often, whereas Social-Emotional Development/Learning Outcome 16: Explains that individuals have different roles and duties in social life (4%), Self-Care Skills/ Learning Outcome 1: Applies body-related hygiene rules (4%), Self-Care Skills/Learning Outcome 7: Protects himself/herself from dangers and accidents (4%) were included at least. Social-Emotional Development/Learning Outcome 10: Fulfills his/her responsibilities and Social-Emotional Development/Learning Outcome 15: Trusts himself/herself was never addressed.

**Table 3.**

*Findings Regarding the Sub-Themes of the Subjects That Teachers Include in Sexual Education*

Subjects	f	%
<b>Sexual Anatomy and Physiology</b>		
Body parts have names and functions.	3	5.76
<b>Body Image</b>		
There are bodies of different shapes, sizes, and colors.	6	11.53
All bodies, including those of the disabled, are equally special.	4	7.69
Differences make us unique.	5	9.61
Every person is proud of his/her body.	3	5.76
<b>Families</b>		
Who does the family consist of?	2	3.84
<b>Friendship</b>		
Friends get to know each other by spending time together.	3	5.76
Friends respect and esteem each other.	3	5.76
Friends share their feelings with each other.	3	5.76
Friends can get angry at each other but can still stay friends.	3	5.76
Friends can help each other.	2	3.84
<b>Values</b>		
Values are strong feelings or beliefs about important issues.	3	5.76
Individuals and families have various values.	1	1.92
People's values are formed by their parents, other family members, peers, society, culture, and religious teachings.	4	7.69
<b>Communication</b>		
Communication is necessary for human relations.	1	1.92
People express how they feel by talking.	1	1.92
<b>Reproductive Health</b>		
We should be careful about body cleanliness.	3	5.76
<b>Gender Roles</b>		
Girls and boys have many similarities and a few differences.	1	1.92
Boys and girls can do the same jobs.	1	1.92
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100</b>

As seen in Table 7, teachers mostly addressed the theme of 'there are bodies of different shapes, sizes, and colors' (11.53%), whereas they also addressed the themes of 'differences make us unique' (9.61%), 'all bodies, including those of the disabled, are equally special' (7.69%), and 'people's values are formed by their parents, other family members, peers, society, culture, and religious teachings' (7.69%). They included the themes of 'individuals and families have various values' (1.92%), 'communication is necessary for human relations' (1.92%), 'people express how they feel by talking' (1.92%), 'girls and boys have many similarities and a few differences' (1.92%), and 'boys and girls can do the same jobs' (1.92%) at least in their education plans.

### **Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

The study, which investigated the views and practices of preschool teachers on sexual development and education, examined the participants' statements about the subjects they addressed regarding sexual development in the preschool period. Most were found to address differences between sexes, body protection, sexual identity, and body recognition. Likewise, in the study by Kardeş and Karaman (2018), teachers referred to discovering one's own body, gender roles, and sexual identity while describing sexual development. In this respect, the results of both studies can be said to be consistent with each other.

Upon examining teachers' opinions about sexual development subjects, the number of teachers who referred to the differences between sexes, body protection, sexual identity, and body recognition was high, and some teachers also mentioned respect for differences, personal hygiene, adolescence, gender stereotypes, and reproduction. However, according to the report 'Standards for Sexual Education in Europe' (2010) of the World Health Organization Regional Office and Federal Center for Health Education (BZgA), sexual education consists of eight headings: human body and its development, fertility and reproduction, sexuality, emotions, lifestyle and relationships, sexual health and well-being, rights, and social-cultural determinants (values/norms) related to sexuality. In the SIECUS Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (2004), sexual education comprises six headings such as human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health, society and culture, and many sub-dimensions. In this regard, it is seen that the knowledge level of teachers on sexual education issues is insufficient, which is thought to be because teachers do not take effective courses on comprehensive sexual development and education during their undergraduate education.

Upon examining whether children asked their teachers questions about sexual development, it was concluded that most children did not ask questions about sexual development. Teachers stated that children might share their curiosity with their families, and families might refer to sexual development as a shame or a sin as possible reasons for this. Likewise, Güzelyurt et al. (2019) reported in their study conducted with teachers

that families had negative attitudes toward sexual education (shame, prohibition, sin). Accordingly, the results of both studies can be said to be consistent with each other.

When it was investigated whether teachers encouraged children to ask questions about sexual development and education, they stated that they did not encourage them to ask questions, and that they expected children to ask questions about the issue. They expressed that they felt incompetent in sexual development and education and had reservations that they would get a reaction from families who thought that the preschool period was too early for sexual development and education. In light of the literature review, training on sexual education was provided to parents, and the effects of the training were investigated in the study by Eliküçük (2011). Before the training, parents were asked to express their opinions about the age of sexual education, and many stated that it should be given between the ages of 7-12, whereas all parents who participated in the study reported after the training that sexual education should be started at the age of 0-3. In this sense, it is seen that prejudices will be eliminated by informing parents about sexual development and education. Sexual development and education cannot be considered unilaterally. Therefore, it is assumed that a positive contribution to children's sexual development will be achieved with the cooperation of parents and teachers after they are given comprehensive training on sexual development and education. It can be aimed at strengthening the cooperation of parents and teachers by providing training and seminars on sexual development and education.

Some teachers stated that children asked questions about sexual development, and these questions were mostly about physical differences between sexes and pregnancy. Moreover, they said that children also asked questions about adolescence and marriage. The study by İşler and Gürşimşek (2018) revealed that parents with children aged 3-6 years talked to their children about physical differences and pregnancy within the scope of sexual development. In this respect, children try to satisfy their curiosity by asking their families and teachers about the same issues related to sexual development in the preschool period. Upon examining teachers' answers to questions, most gave avoidant and scientific answers, while some gave answers based on religious beliefs and social myths. The study conducted by Yağan Güder and Alabay (2018) elucidated that parents mostly gave avoidant and religious answers while answering their children's questions about sexual development. Accordingly, the answers given by teachers and parents to questions about sexual development are parallel. Parents and teachers, the two important learning environments for children, can be said to be important sources for accurate information to be obtained by children in line with their curiosity and age. Therefore, teachers and parents should be informed about sexual education. When teachers' emotional states in the face of questions were examined, they stated they were confused, nervous, and anxious because they had inadequate knowledge about sexual development and education. In the study by Phiphitphatphaisit and Saengjun (2007), teachers were embarrassed when talking about sexual education and had reservations about how to start the subject. The study result can be said to be consistent with the literature. Regarding changes in children's questions or how they asked questions after teachers' answers, most teachers stated that there was a change in children's questions

and that children asked questions at higher levels. In this context, it can be said that when children's questions are answered without ignoring their curiosity, changes are observed in the way they ask questions, and informing parents and teachers, the two important learning environments for the child, about sexual development and education significantly affects the development of children.

Upon examining whether parents asked teachers questions about sexual development and education, some parents asked questions, while others did not. Parents who asked questions consulted teachers on gender roles, physical differences between sexes, masturbation, sexual games, and childbirth. When teachers' guidance on these questions was examined, they often made suggestions to families within their knowledge. Thus, it can be said that it is important for teachers to have adequate knowledge about sexual development and education. In addition to children's questions about sexual development, parents also consult teachers about sexual development and education. Therefore, training teachers on sexual development should not be ignored in order to provide accurate and sufficient information to parents and children. While a group of teachers who participated in the study stated that parents asked them questions, another group expressed that parents did not ask them questions. Regarding the reasons why parents did not ask teachers questions on sexual development and education, teachers stated that parents thought they had adequate knowledge about this subject, they found it inappropriate to discuss it due to social myths, they considered talking about it a sin, they were embarrassed, or they believed that the preschool period was too early for sexual development and education. In the relevant literature, Turnbull, Wersch, and Schaik (2008) reported that parents were embarrassed and uncomfortable while answering their children's questions about sexual development. In this sense, it can be said that parents who are afraid of talking to their children about sexual development are also embarrassed to talk to teachers about sexual development and do not communicate with teachers since they feel nervous.

Upon examining whether parents requested training on sexual development and education for themselves and their children, all teachers participating in the study stated that parents did not have such a request. They emphasized that the reason for parents not request training was that they considered themselves competent. The studies by Göçgeldi et al. (2007) and Baysan (2020) reported that parents with children aged 3-6 years felt competent in sexual education. Hence, the results can be considered consistent. However, informative training can be organized for families to provide accurate information to their children regarding people from whom they should receive support in certain cases.

The types of sexual behaviors observed by teachers in their classrooms and their methods to cope with these behaviors were reviewed. Teachers expressed that they encountered cases such as masturbation, sexual games such as games about pregnancy and marriage, and gender role games, as well as the behavior of taking off clothes untimely, such as taking them off outside or inside the classroom when children needed to go to the toilet, and laughing at some words such as popo (butt) and kaka (poop). In

the relevant literature, Kardeş and Karaman (2018) and Balter, Rhijn, and Davies (2016) reported in their studies on teachers that masturbation was among the most observed sexual behaviors in classrooms. Although masturbation in the classroom is a natural behavior for children in the preschool period, it is believed that teachers should be careful about how they behave when they face this situation. When teachers' methods of coping with masturbation behavior were examined, they mostly tried to distract children, then prevent and warn them. In the relevant literature, Omranifard et al. (2013) stated that distraction was an effective method when masturbation behavior was observed in childhood. Upon reviewing the relevant literature, teachers can be said to have adequate knowledge about masturbation behavior in childhood.

Concerning teachers' reactions when they encountered sexual games, some teachers stated that they usually did not intervene, while others warned children about these behaviors, informed parents about the case, considered behaviors related to gender roles normal, and did not intervene in them. When the coping methods of the teachers who stated that they encountered laughing behavior when children heard words such as popo (butt), kaka (poop), etc. in their classrooms were examined, they expressed that they tried to normalize these words to avoid reactions by saying, 'These are parts of the body just like arms, legs, etc. and parts of the body are not laughed at.' In general, teachers adopt the right approach toward the sexual games they encounter in their classrooms. Adult individuals' reactions to sexual games are important. Reactions such as shouting and embarrassment should not be given when observing sexual games (Eliküçük, 2011).

When teachers' implementation of activities on sexual development and education in their classrooms was investigated, many stated that they partially implemented activities, whereas a part of the teachers implemented activities or others did not. The reasons that prevented teachers who partially implemented and did not implement activities from implementing activities on sexual development and education were examined. They stated that they did not implement any activities since they did not have adequate knowledge about sexual education, they hesitated to get reactions from parents, and the preschool period might be an early period for sexual education. In general, the reason why teachers do not implement activities on sexual development is their inadequate knowledge about sexual education and their fear of getting reactions. On the other hand, a group of preschool teachers reported that they implemented activities on sexual development and education in their classrooms. To prevent teachers from lacking knowledge about the sexual development and education of children, organizations can be made to provide preservice teachers with comprehensive sexual development and education lessons during their education and help them gain competency in creating activities on sexual development and education appropriate for children's ages and needs so that the healthy sexual development of children can be ensured. During the interviews, teachers commented on the study. During the interviews, teachers emphasized that their awareness of the subject increased, and the study helped them see their shortcomings.

Considering the activities implemented by teachers to support the sexual development of children in their classrooms, they stressed that they implemented activities on subjects such as private areas, the differences between sexes, gender stereotypes, body parts, and personal hygiene. When it was investigated whether teachers who implemented or partially implemented activities in their classrooms received feedback from parents or children regarding their activities, most teachers said that they did not receive any feedback. They stated that they did not receive feedback because they did not address subjects for which they would get a reaction, subjects taught in the class were not followed by families, children did not tell their families about the subjects taught in the classroom, families were satisfied with the subjects taught, and these subjects were considered normal by parents.

Whether teachers included sexual development and education in their education plans was reviewed. One hundred daily education plans were examined, and only 28 included sexual development and education. Upon examining with which activity plans teachers integrated sexual development and education, they were seen to often integrate it with Turkish (26.47%), art (16.17%), music (13.23%), and play (13.23%) activities. It was reviewed which learning outcomes and indicators that were included in the curriculum of the Ministry of National Education and might be related to sexual development and education were used by teachers while creating activity plans covering sexual development and education. They often included Social-Emotional Development/Learning Outcome 8: Respects differences (48%), Social-Emotional Development/Learning Outcome 1: Introduces his/her characteristics (12%), Social-Emotional Development/Learning Outcome 6: Protects his/her and others' rights (12%) in their plans. When the subjects related to sexual development and education in the activity plans were examined, teachers were found to often include body image (30%), friendship (23.33%), and values (13.33%) in their plans. These data show that there are not many studies on sexual development and education included in education plans. Teachers explained this by their hesitation about parents' attitudes, their inadequate knowledge, and insufficient sources. Researchers who want to study this subject can investigate the effects of activities on children's sexual development by creating activity books about sexual development and education. Informative training on sexual development and education for parents and teachers can be studied. Animations about sexual development and education can be prepared for the time of day when people watch television the most to raise awareness of all segments of society. Free training can be given to families in cultural centers through municipalities. Experts can organize monthly webinars on the subject so that teachers can access accurate information.



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