

Conflicts and Response Strategies in Sexuality Education Practices by Guest Educators in China: Focusing on Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Background: The sexual environment surrounding young people in China has been deteriorating. Although the government has issued policies to promote school-based sexuality education, implementation remains problematic. However, due to the weak institutional positioning of these guest educators and insufficient policy safeguards, they frequently encounter conflicts. While previous research has primarily focused on regular school teachers and institutional barriers, guest educators in China remain an insufficiently theorized category of practitioners. To address this gap, this study examines the conflicts guest educators face, analyzes how they respond, and proposes a Motivation-Conflict-Strategy model.

Method: This qualitative study recruited eight guest educators affiliated with the Family Sexuality Education Subcommittee of the Chinese Sexology Association. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Result: The analysis yielded a Motivation-Conflict-Strategy model. Guest educators exhibit strong motivation to implement sexuality education, grounded in personal experiences, professional experiences, and value orientations. Yet, during implementation, they face multiple conflicts: (a) conflicts rooted in value frictions, (b) personal dilemmas, (c) conflicts stemming from institutional instability and devaluation, and (d) conflicts arising from positional vulnerability. Crucially, these strategies in turn reshape educators' motivation, making the model a recursive Motivation-Conflict-Strategy-Motivation loop rather than a linear sequence. The "Motivation-Conflict-Strategy" model reconceptualizes sexuality education in China as a dynamic interplay among institutional structures, sociocultural norms, and individual agency, highlighting the urgent need to establish institutional safeguards for diverse practitioners and to develop specialized sexuality education programs at teacher training colleges.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual risks among adolescents in China have intensified in recent years. Both sexual offenses committed by minors and those perpetrated against minors have increased. In 2024, 9,457 registered cases of rape involved minors as offenders, and 40,835 perpetrators were recorded in cases of sexual crimes against minors.(1) Reports also document a decreasing age of sexual debut, with cases occurring as early as 12 years old.(2)(3) Additionally, young people represent a significant proportion of new HIV infections; in 2015, individuals aged 20 years or younger accounted for approximately 40% of new cases.(4) Collectively, these indicators demonstrate, from both epidemiological and behavioral perspectives, the urgent need for effective sexuality education for adolescents.

The legal foundation for implementing sexuality education within formal institutions has been established. The 2020 revision of the Minor Protection Law requires schools and kindergartens to provide age-appropriate sexuality education to minors,(5) while the 2021 revision of the Population and Family Planning Law mandates the implementation of physiological hygiene education, adolescent education, and sexual health education in schools.(6) Thus, the legal framework affirms the necessity and the intended recipients of sexuality education. Despite this, adolescents' knowledge of sexual health remains limited, which indicates that the provision of school-based sexuality education is still insufficient. At the same time, teachers serve as the primary agents in implementing sexuality education. International research identifies teachers as central to the success of effective programs,

emphasizing the importance of trust, professional discretion, and access to resources.(7) Teachers also act as key gatekeepers when students encounter conflicting messages regarding personal, social, and sexual issues.(8) Consequently, teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward sexuality directly affect students' receptivity and motivation to learn.(9) When teachers engage proactively and adopt supportive roles, student learning outcomes improve.(10)

In contrast, Chinese research consistently identifies significant challenges faced by designated teachers, including limited knowledge and pedagogical skills, unclear role boundaries, reduced sense of responsibility, avoidance behaviors influenced by traditional values and resistance from parents or communities, inadequate institutional support such as guidelines, teaching materials, training, and evaluation, and limited opportunities for personal learning and professional development.(11–15) These constraints have led to an increase in the outsourcing of school-based sexuality education. According to a nationwide online survey conducted in September-October 2021 via an online platform, which targeted kindergartens, primary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools across 33 provincial-level regions in mainland China and collected 2,140 valid student questionnaires and 2,146 valid teacher questionnaires, about 31.38% of schools providing sexuality education rely on guest educators.(16)

This article defines guest educators as external practitioners who are not employed by the school but are invited to deliver sexuality education. However, this broad definition overlaps with several categories of practitioners discussed in international literature, such as external facilitators, visiting instructors, and community-based educators. While guest educators share some features with these categories, they also occupy a distinct position. External facilitators and community-based educators, although they frequently engage in school-based education, primarily operate outside the classroom setting. Visiting instructors, by contrast, deliver education within the classroom and are recognized as professionals. The guest educators examined in this study likewise teach within classrooms, but unlike visiting instructors, they are not yet recognized as professionals. Through individual agency, they undertake and complete training for sexuality educators, and although invited by schools to teach, they remain institutionally marginalized. Their professional backgrounds vary and include teachers, physicians, social workers, and practitioners from related fields, with the commonality of having completed non-formal training in sexuality education. Their activities are shaped by a range

of organizational and external factors, such as policy ambiguity, design deficiencies, and the coordination costs involved in working with in-school teachers, administrators, and parents. In particular, sexuality-related topics often conflict with prevailing cultural norms, resulting in tension and contestation in practice.(17–19) These conditions indicate that when guest educators carry out sexuality education, conflicts are likely to arise. However, to the best of our knowledge, no existing studies in China have specifically addressed guest educators, highlighting a critical gap and the urgent need to investigate the challenges they face.

This study examines the conflicts guest educators encounter when delivering sexuality education within schools under these conditions. Conflict is defined as a state in which two or more strong, mutually incompatible motives arise simultaneously.(20) Building on previous research, response strategies are described through two process concepts. The first is the Avoid conflict acceptance process, in which educators reduce or euphemize content to align with school norms, parental sensitivities, and local cultural boundaries to ensure instructional viability. The second is the Approach conflict-Effort process, where educators build consensus and coordinate resources with administrators, homeroom teachers, parents, and student representatives to expand their discretion over content and pedagogy.(19) This framework conceptualizes guest educators' practice as a linkage among entry motivations, the structure of conflicts during implementation, and response strategies. This paper aims to clarify the conflict structures faced by guest educators in the context of sexuality education in China and the specific techniques they employ to address these conflicts. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following three research questions:

RQ1: As sources of conflict, what motivations lead guest educators to take on the implementation of sexuality education?

RQ2: What kinds of conflicts do guest educators encounter while implementing sexuality education?

RQ3: What strategies do guest educators employ to address these conflicts?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Data collection occurred in two phases. During the first phase in August 2024, individual interviews were conducted with seven guest educators engaged in sexuality education. The second phase, in May 2025, involved follow-up interviews with two informants from the initial phase and the recruitment of one

additional participant. The follow-up interviews were conducted for two complementary purposes. First, a preliminary analysis of the initial seven interviews revealed several themes that required further exploration, particularly regarding the informants' responses to institutional constraints and the evolution of their educational strategies. These themes could not be fully examined within the scope of the initial interviews. Second, the follow-up phase served as a form of "member checking," allowing participants to verify, confirm, and refine the researchers' preliminary interpretations of their own accounts. An additional participant was recruited at this stage to broaden the range of educational settings represented in the sample and to determine whether new perspectives would generate new categories of analysis. However, through the follow-up interviews, no substantial new codes or themes emerged beyond those already identified in the first phase. Instead, recurring patterns were deepened and contextualized, leading us to conclude that thematic saturation had been reached.

In total, eight interview transcripts were included in the final analysis. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes, was audio-recorded with the informant's consent, and was transcribed verbatim.

Sampling and recruitment were conducted through participation in a conference of the Family Sexuality Education Subcommittee of the Chinese Sexology Association in Beijing in July 2024. With support from the conference secretariat, a call for interview volunteers was distributed. Interested individuals engaged in sexuality education were approached, and their eligibility was confirmed. To reduce sampling bias, informants were selected to reflect diversity in school levels served and organizational affiliation. The primary

informants were guest educators involved in school-based sexuality education. Informants ranged in age from their 20s to 40s; seven were women, and one was a man. Educational backgrounds included bachelor's and master's degrees, with most holding a bachelor's degree. Occupations included social workers, school teachers, a physician, a corporate employee, and practitioners operating sexuality-education companies or workshops. Most informants served primary and lower-secondary schools; one worked exclusively in primary education, and one also taught at the upper-secondary level. Informant characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, the final sample included eight informants. As noted later, the first author established strong rapport with the informants. This allowed for the collection of rich and detailed accounts. Through semi-structured interviews, the informants described their motivations, challenges, and strategies for addressing these issues. In this study, narratives were documented as fully as possible, following the concept of "thick description".⁽²¹⁾ Each transcript was coded and organized thematically. No new themes emerged from the seventh and eighth informants; instead, they expanded on the existing themes. Therefore, the data were considered to be saturated and sufficient for this qualitative study.⁽²²⁾

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis.⁽²³⁾ The analytic process included familiarization with the data and initial memoing, coding of meaningful units, generation of candidate themes through code aggregation, review and refinement of inter-theme relationships, naming and defining themes, and analytic write-up with selection of illustrative quotations. Coding and maintenance of analytic memos were performed by the authors to enhance transparency and auditability of interpretations. The analytical procedure is shown in Figure 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of research informants

ID	Age Group	Gender	Highest degree	Occupation	School level(s) served
A	20s	Male	Master's	Operates a sexuality-education company	Primary; lower secondary
B	30s	Female	Bachelor's	High-school teacher (responsible for safety education)	Primary; lower secondary; upper secondary
C	30s	Female	Bachelor's	Social worker	Primary; lower secondary
D	30s	Female	Bachelor's	Runs sexuality-education workshops	Primary; lower secondary
E	30s	Female	Bachelor's	Physician	Primary; lower secondary
F	30s	Female	Bachelor's	Primary-school teacher (science)	Primary
G	40s	Female	Bachelor's	Corporate employee	Primary; lower secondary
H	40s	Female	Bachelor's	Social worker	Primary; lower secondary

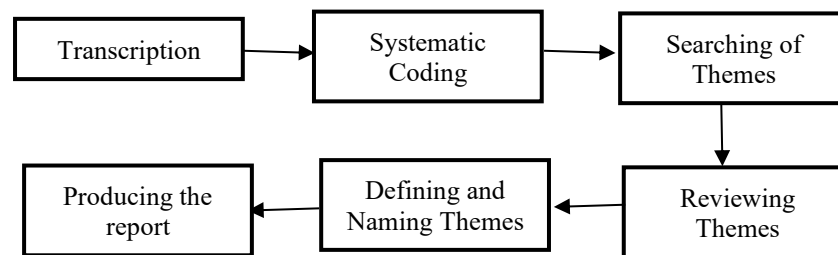


Figure 1. Thematic analysis procedure adapted from Braun and Clarke

The first author, while affiliated with a research institution in Japan, also served as a member of the Family Sexuality Education Subcommittee of the Chinese Sexology Association. This dual affiliation positioned the author as a "partial insider" in this study. Initially, the first author, who was born and raised in China, relocated to Japan for graduate studies and has resided there for the past eight years. This experience afforded a certain degree of analytical distance from the Chinese context while simultaneously cultivating a broader, more global perspective that facilitated a balanced and reflective interpretation of the data. Furthermore, the author was not entirely an outsider in the field. By sharing membership in the same professional association as the informants, the author established a degree of trust through prior academic and professional interactions, which facilitated relatively open and candid conversations during the interview. Given this dual positionality and in accordance with the qualitative research approach adopted in this study, particular care was taken to ground the analysis as closely as possible to the informants' own narratives. Additionally, the second author, affiliated with a research institution in China, participated in the narrative coding and interpretation process. This involvement provided an external perspective and served to mitigate potential bias in the analysis.

All transcripts were anonymized. Proper nouns and potentially identifying details were pseudonymized and, when necessary, replaced with non-identifying descriptors. The study received ethical approval from the Graduate School of Education and Human Development, Nagoya University (Approval No. 24-2193). Written informed consent was obtained from all informants prior to data collection.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

We coded the data using thematic analysis and visualized the results in Figure 2. This analytical framework

conceptualizes "motivation," "conflict," and "strategy" not as linear but as recursive relationships, illustrating how each element is continuously shaped through mutual influence. First, motivations grounded in personal experience, professional practice, and values serve not only as catalysts for practice but also as sources of conflict. In other words, the beliefs and experiences that drive educators simultaneously shape which conflicts emerge and become salient. Next, conflicts can be broadly classified into two types, each associated with distinct strategic orientations. Internal conflicts related to values and personal educational philosophies are addressed through "Approach conflict-Effort" strategies, such as professional development, the creation of teaching materials, and collaboration with parents. In contrast, structural conflicts, such as those arising from institutional constraints and job insecurity, tend to be managed through "avoidance-acceptance" strategies. Thus, the choice of strategy is shaped not by individual traits alone, but by the nature and locus of the conflict. Furthermore, these strategies feed back into motivation, leading to its reconfiguration. The success of approach-oriented strategies tends to reinforce motivation, whereas the continued acceptance of structural constraints gradually reshapes educators' perceptions of what is feasible or worthwhile in their practice. In this way, the three elements are cyclically interconnected, forming an ongoing process of change. The following sections provide a detailed discussion of each theme: "motivation," "conflict," and "strategy."

Motivation (source of the conflict)

Informants identified three interconnected pathways leading to their involvement as guest educators in sexuality education: Personal-experience-based motivations, Professional-practice-based motivations, and Value-oriented motivations anchored in normative commitments.

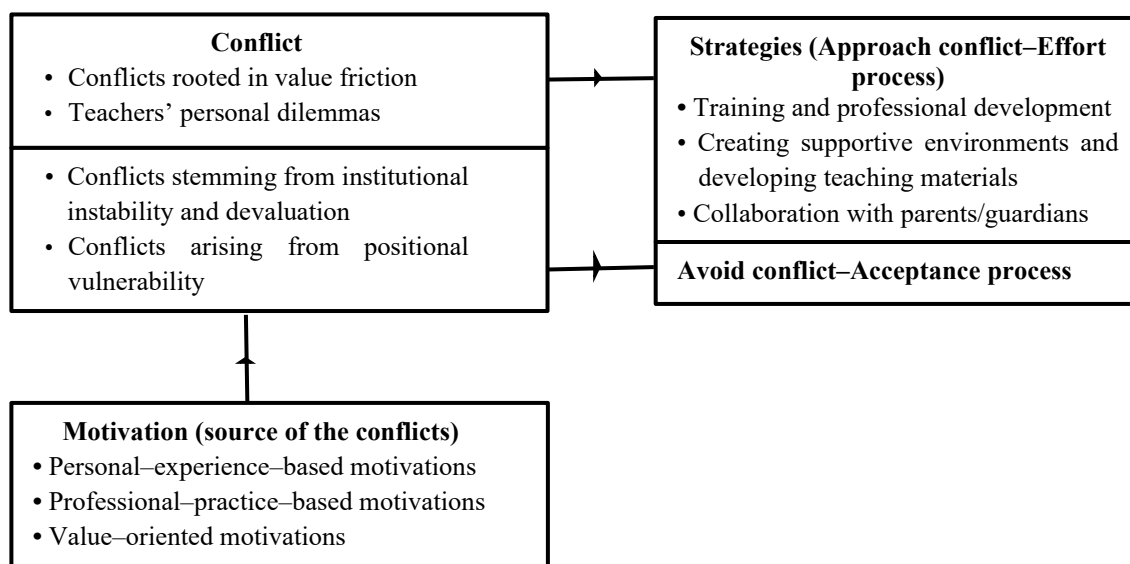


Figure 2. Model diagram derived from data analysis

Personal-experience-based motivations

“When I was little, sexuality was entirely taboo at home, and I don’t remember any systematic learning at school. That gap kept bothering me and made me want to pass this knowledge on to the next generation.” (A,20s)

“My parents assumed ‘you’ll understand without being told,’ so I never had the chance to learn correct terms. I want the next generation to have the knowledge. And one of my friends was forbidden to have contact with males by her parents since she was a child. Now she is unsure about the appropriate interpersonal distance with males. From this, I also realized that it was fundamentally an information deficit.” (E,30s)

“Reading picture books with my daughter, I paused over how to explain certain parts; it made me feel the need to speak clearly rather than gloss over things.” (G,40s)

These narratives illustrate that guest educators’ engagement in sexuality education is shaped by deficiencies in their own early learning and heightened awareness of these gaps. During their primary and lower secondary education, many Chinese schools lacked systematic sexuality education, often shifting this responsibility to families. However, cultural norms and feelings of shame frequently led parents to avoid such discussions, resulting in widespread silence on the topic.(24) This pattern is not unique to China. Sexuality-related topics are also often treated as taboo in other Asian societies, such as Malaysia, Korea, and Indonesia.(25–27) In contrast to many European countries, where schools provide structured and explicit

sexuality education curricula,(28) China is characterized by the absence of a systematic school-based curriculum and the difficulty of addressing such topics within the family. Together, these conditions have created a vacuum that motivates individuals to step in as guest educators.

Consequently, informants’ limited knowledge during youth motivated them to provide more comprehensive information to the next generation, including their own children. Observing the long-term effects of restrictive rules, such as prohibiting contact with the opposite sex, further clarified the enduring consequences of inadequate information and reinforced their conviction that intervention is necessary. Collectively, these personal and observed experiences have inspired informants to advocate for preventive sexuality education and assume roles as guest educators.

Professional-practice-based motivations

“While working in the field of child protection, I came to realize the importance of sexuality education.” (C,30s)

“As a high school Chinese language teacher interacting with students, I sensed their need for sexuality education. I applied to the school and had my subject changed to ‘Safety Education’, taking on responsibility for sexuality education at my school and nearby schools.” (B,30s)

A second motivation derives from professional experience. As discussed in the introduction, China is experiencing a rise in sexuality-related issues among minors, compounded by increased exposure to online misinformation. Informants B and C, who work closely

with children, identified distinct learning needs in this generation. This recognition led them to acknowledge the significance of sexuality education and to assume responsibility for its implementation.

Value-oriented motivations

All informants articulated, in various forms, the belief that sexuality education matters. It shows that they emphasized the importance of sexuality education, which can be read as a value-oriented motivation. This perspective, shaped by both personal and professional experiences, translates into active participation as guest educators. These motivations not only drive their engagement but also inform their proactive responses to the conflicts encountered during implementation.

In summary, the narratives in this study indicate that guest educators are sufficiently motivated to implement sexuality education, drawing on their personal experiences, professional backgrounds, and core values.

Conflict

The guest educator is committed to engaging in sexuality education even in China, where cultural norms present challenges to implementation. From the perspective of conflict theory, the conflicts encountered arise from opposing motivations:(29) the proactive motivation to implement, and the avoidance motivation caused by various constraints. These conflicting motivations manifest as practical conflicts in the field. According to the narratives, four types of conflict emerge: conflicts rooted in value friction; teachers' personal conflicts; conflicts stemming from institutional instability and devaluation; and conflicts arising from positional vulnerability.

Conflicts rooted in value friction

Parental refusal

"Parents may acknowledge that sexuality education is necessary, yet they often hesitate for their own child to attend (seeing it as a waste of time)." (G,40s)

"Parents are unaware of their own knowledge gaps; many view sexuality education merely as anatomy or abuse-prevention instruction and are therefore uninterested." (E,30s)

Children's attitudes

"Some children cover their ears or close their eyes during class." (F,30s)

"Children are embarrassed at first and seem shy." (B,30s)

"When shown images of the nude body, children initially shout as a group or avoid looking at it out of embarrassment. And male students teased a female teacher, asking, 'Will you go out with me?' Perhaps it's an attempt to assert power." (D,30s)

"Joking and mockery are concerning; some students shout, 'The teacher is a pervert!' In a lesson on menstrual pads, boys reacted inappropriately, even tearing the pads." (C,30s)

"When I presented a case where a boy who liked dolls and skirts was bullied, and asked how they would respond, one student shouted, 'I'll kill him.' I struggled with how to respond." (E,30s)

Value misalignments between parents, students, and teachers create conflicts for educators. In China's competitive educational context, exam preparation is prioritized, and because sexuality education is not an examination subject, parents often regard it as less important. Additionally, sexuality-related topics are frequently considered taboo within a Confucian cultural framework.(30) Confucian thought places strong emphasis on the cultivation of virtue and the maintenance of social and ethical order, grounded in core concepts such as ren (benevolence), yi (righteousness), and li (propriety). Within this framework, individuals are expected to regulate their behavior in accordance with social norms and to prioritize collective harmony over personal desires. As a result, sexuality tends to be morally regulated and confined to socially sanctioned contexts, particularly marriage, while open discussion of sexual matters is often discouraged. Similar tendencies have also been observed in other Confucian-influenced societies, such as Vietnam.(31)

In the Chinese context, these cultural norms intersect with an exam-oriented educational system and the marginal status of sexuality education, reinforcing the perception that sexuality is both morally sensitive and educationally peripheral. Consequently, classroom discussions of reproductive anatomy often provoke visible student reactions, including embarrassment, joking, and avoidance.

Teachers' personal conflict

"The most difficult part of sexuality education is teaching attitudes and values; I worry about how to convey them through lessons." (E,30s)

"Early sessions can involve tension and shame, but with repeated delivery it becomes possible to teach more naturally." (D,30s)

"I felt embarrassed at first, but now I think that as long as I am not embarrassed, others will not feel embarrassed either." (C,30s)

Sexuality education emphasizes the development of attitudes and values rather than solely the transmission of knowledge.(8) Many trained guest educators support this approach, yet they often struggle to effectively communicate values to students through their language, materials, and facilitation methods in classroom settings.

Conflicts stemming from institutional instability and devaluation

Policy implementation gaps

"Although instruments such as the Minor Protection Law stipulate sexuality education, in practice implementation depends on municipal/district policies; some municipalities do not prioritize it." (A,20s)

"Even where initiatives exist, much is left to schools' discretion. I negotiate proactively, but it is often still deprioritized." (B,30s)

"During government audits, there were occasions when schools created the appearance of implementation—completing paperwork despite not having delivered the classes." (F,30s)

Limits on the number of sessions

"I am invited when students are found writing erotic fiction or drawing obscene images, but delivery is restricted to one or two sessions. Ideally, it should be regular." (E,30s)

"When the school discovers students dating or holding hands, I am asked to teach a session on sexuality education, but the number of sessions is strictly limited." (B,30s; D,30s)

"I am invited only when conduct is deemed 'problematic'." (G,40s)

Constraints in the educational environment

"Co-educational classes are best for sexuality education, but at one school, the grade cohort had around 2,000 students and no venue could accommodate everyone; I had to split the sessions by gender." (D,30s)

"I was invited to teach a grade with about 3,500 students. I could not address individual questions and ended up delivering the session standing in the schoolyard throughout." (B,30s)

Conflicts arising from institutional instability and devaluation stem from three primary sources: inadequate policy implementation, restrictions on the number of instructional sessions, and limitations within the educational environment. While national legislation supports sexuality education, its implementation depends largely on municipal and school-level discretion, resulting in a persistent gap between policy mandates and actual practice. A comparable pattern has been documented in China, where the policy-making process has been characterized as "puzzle-like," producing fragmented and poorly integrated implementation across local authorities,(32) and a study of thirty middle schools across six provinces similarly identifies a substantial gap between formal policy and actual classroom delivery.(33) Respondents in this study described instances where schools prioritized compliance with policy documentation over substantive instruction, particularly during audits.

Additionally, sexuality education is often delivered reactively, with guest educators invited only after problematic behavior is identified. As highlighted in the motivations section, guest educators advocate for sexuality education as a preventive measure, but insufficient institutional prioritization disrupts continuity and curricular coherence, thereby impeding effective instruction. Environmental challenges, such as large student cohorts and inadequate venues, further constrain coeducational and dialogic teaching formats, limiting opportunities for individual engagement and reducing instructional quality. Comparable constraints have been reported among Chinese formal teachers, whose examination-dominated school culture and large-class structures have been identified as principal obstacles to delivering dialogic sexuality education.(30) Taken together, these parallels suggest that the environmental constraints identified in the present study reflect a broader regional pattern rather than a context-specific anomaly.

Conflicts arising from positional vulnerability

"I demonstrated condom use with a banana during class. The students' response was positive, but the vice principal was concerned about the content, and the school stopped inviting me." (B,30s)

"I taught sexuality education to sixth graders and introduced the reproductive organs. Parents later

complained that the content 'went too far,' and I was no longer assigned sixth-grade sexuality classes. As a part-time instructor, my position is fragile. To deliver classes, I must negotiate repeatedly with the principal and vice principal." (F,30s)

"I negotiate class content with the principal, but unless both the principal and vice principal agree, I cannot deliver the class." (D,30s)

This instability highlights a structural gap affecting guest educators. Existing policies neither guarantee their status nor mandate their involvement, resulting in ad hoc and demand-driven provision at the discretion of individual schools. As a result, decisions about implementing sexuality education are delegated to school administrators, requiring guest educators to repeatedly negotiate permissions and curricular content. This issue is also evident through the author's experience as a member of the same Subcommittee, where guest educators frequently express difficulties in engaging with school authorities. This institutional fragility leads to discontinuity and an ongoing risk of interruption in the delivery of sexuality education.

Strategies

Despite institutional constraints and value-based challenges, informants employed three primary strategies: engaging in training and professional development, creating supportive classroom environments and developing or adapting instructional materials, and collaborating with parents and guardians. Within the theoretical framework, these actions represent an Approach conflict-Effort process, wherein guest educators seek to enhance the delivery of sexuality education through continuous professional growth, intentional classroom design, and consensus-building with parents.

Training and Professional Development

Enhancing personal knowledge and instructional capacity:

"I continue to attend trainings in sexuality education. I also joined the Chinese Sexology Association and work on improving my competencies." (B,30s)

"Instructor stance is crucial for addressing children's resistance. By continuing to study, I try to teach with a natural, calm attitude." (H,40s)

"I do not focus only on sexuality education; I also study art and physical education. In class I ask children to draw a uterus or notice bodily functions while moving, so they see that 'sexuality' is part of everyday life and can cultivate attitudes and values." (E,30s)

Information exchange among guest educators:

"Part-time instructors maintain a chat group on social media. We regularly share information and ask questions there. Interaction with experienced instructors and sexuality-education researchers is very helpful." (C,30s)

"In the training program I joined, instructors meet online on a regular basis to discuss challenges and questions encountered in class; it helps a lot." (D,30s)

Clarifying one's role and stance:

"Before class, I explicitly state my aim: I am here to convey scientific knowledge." (C,30s)

"Sexuality has a dual nature: it concerns privacy, but it is also scientific knowledge. I make this clear before starting the lesson." (A,20s)

When asked about their responses to these conflicts, guest educators most often cited self-improvement through ongoing training and study. Although many hold other primary occupations, they consistently participate in sexuality education trainings and seek guidance from experienced practitioners to update their knowledge and pedagogical skills. In contrast, studies on full-time teachers in China indicate that they also experience conflicts related to insufficient knowledge and uncertainty about how to teach sexuality education; however, proactive strategies to address these challenges appear to be limited.(34) By comparison, guest educators, despite facing similar constraints, actively engage in training and professional learning. This pattern may reflect a form of agency shaped by their position outside formal institutional structures.

Guest educators also navigate the dual nature of sexuality, which encompasses both private aspects and its role as a public educational subject, as discussed in the literature. To address this, they clarify their instructional stance at the beginning of each class, emphasizing that the session presents sexuality as scientific, evidence-based knowledge for educational purposes. By highlighting their professional expertise and the scientific basis of the content, they aim to mitigate value-based tensions and foster classroom receptivity.

Creating Supportive Environments and Developing Teaching Materials

Building safe and reassuring classroom climates:

"We arrange the classroom so that principals or homeroom teachers do not enter, creating a safe and free space. This helps reduce children's embarrassment and resistance." (C,30s)

"At the start of each session, I always include an introductory activity—such as a game—to ease students' embarrassment or resistance toward sexuality." (D,30s)

Developing instructional materials:

"I develop my own materials. To spark students' interest, I created a participatory detective-theater game related to sexuality education." (A,20s)

"I have produced a variety of materials—card games, coloring sheets, and even clear folders and badges related to sexuality education—which I give to the children." (E,30s)

The expertise developed through training is reflected in both classroom environment design and instructional materials. Key practices include establishing consensus on safety, allowing anonymous questions, using introductory games to ease entry into sensitive topics, presenting precise terminology, employing participatory teaching materials, combining single-sex and co-educational sessions as appropriate, and framing content in a scientific and inclusive manner. These strategies help reduce shame, rejection, and ridicule, which are common under Confucian values, thereby fostering greater participation and understanding.

Collaboration with Parents/Guardians

Briefings for parents:

"Before delivering classes, we hold online information sessions for parents to obtain consent. We introduce the instructor's identity, background, competencies, and the lesson content." (G,40s)

"Before running a sexuality-education workshop, we hold a briefing for parents and also collect a survey. After these briefings, the approval rate for holding the workshop increased (from 70% to 98%)." (E,30s)

Parent reading groups:

"By staying connected with parents via social media and reading books related to sexuality education together, we

hoped both to foster parental acceptance of the program and to contribute to sexuality education at home." (E,30s)

The flexibility guest educators possess due to their position outside formal institutional structures facilitates collaboration with parents. In this role, they act as innovators who address gaps in school-based sexuality education. Rather than passively adapting to institutional or cultural pressures, they actively engage and communicate with parents, reinforcing the essential role of educators in promoting young people's sexual health and learning.

Looking more closely, these practices may also feed back into the educators' own motivation. The skills and knowledge developed through continuous self-improvement, together with the relationships built with parents, can support more effective educational practices in subsequent contexts. In turn, these experiences appear to strengthen educators' confidence and commitment to their work.

On the other hand, the very flexibility that makes this system possible entails structural costs that cannot be overlooked, and it warrants critical examination. First, because guest educators operate outside of formal employment relationships, their status is inherently precarious, lacking stable contracts, institutional support, and clear career paths. As a result, the sustainability of their activities depends heavily on individual motivation and the school's willingness to accept them. Second, the absence of a standardized curriculum and reliance on individual teaching materials led to inconsistencies in learning content. Third, this informal system obscures accountability, leaving it unclear who is responsible for ensuring educational quality, age appropriateness, and follow-up support.

These challenges demonstrate that while the guest educator model can fill institutional gaps, it cannot serve as a substitute for a formal system. Rather, they highlight the need to formally integrate sexuality education into the school curriculum, accompanied by clear standards, sustained institutional support, and professionally trained personnel.

CONCLUSION

This study examined guest educators as central actors in the implementation of sexuality education in China, using qualitative data to map the process connecting their entry motivations, the conflicts encountered during implementation, and their response strategies. The findings indicate that these educators confront multiple layers of conflict, including a lack of stable institutional support, dependence on administrative discretion, cultural and social taboos, and the personal challenges of teaching attitudes and

values required by comprehensive sexuality education. Nevertheless, they employ strategic and agentic practices, such as developing or adapting instructional materials, building consensus with parents through briefings and surveys, and designing psychologically safe and participatory classroom environments to sustain effective instruction.

Guest educators should be understood not as static, auxiliary personnel but as active agents of practice. This observation indicates that sexuality education is constituted through the interplay of institutional structures, sociocultural norms, and individual agency, while also underscoring the need for robust training programs for those who deliver it.

Based on these findings, this study offers recommendations to three stakeholder groups. First, for policymakers: while the implementation of sexuality education is currently legally mandated, the lack of clear regulations regarding who is responsible for delivering it remains a challenge. Moving forward, it is necessary to advance clearer institutionalization, as well as to establish public certification for sexuality education practitioners and ensure job security for them. Second, for curriculum developers, it is necessary to establish a nationwide framework that is systematic and culturally sensitive, tailored to different age groups. This framework should integrate scientifically accurate knowledge with aspects such as relationships, emotions, and rights, providing standardized teaching materials while also possessing the flexibility to adapt to local contexts. Third, regarding teacher training colleges, currently only a limited number of institutions offer majors in sexuality education. Moving forward, it is necessary to enhance the content and methods of sexuality education instruction at a greater number of teacher training colleges. In summary, while the proactive efforts of guest educators are important, they cannot serve as a substitute for institutional frameworks. Going forward, a shift is required from a situation reliant on individuals to a sustainable, institutionally supported sexuality education system through collaboration among policy, curriculum, and teacher training.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample of guest educators was limited, which prevented us from fully addressing imbalances in attributes such as school levels served, regions, and organizational affiliations. Future research should incorporate multi-site comparisons that include both part-time and full-time teachers. Second, although applying the theoretical framework allowed us to substantiate the Motivation-Conflict-Strategy-Motivation loop, the reverse pathways, particularly how conflict reshapes motivation, as well as the iterative processes of

adjustment and learning between these elements, remain insufficiently tested. To further refine the model developed in this study and verify its validity, future research should pursue two complementary directions. First, to test the model's applicability under varying economic, cultural, and policy conditions, a comprehensive survey spanning diverse regions of China is necessary; such comparative research could be usefully extended to other East Asian societies to identify which dynamics are culturally universal. Second, by collecting a larger and more diverse sample of guest educators and conducting longitudinal comparisons with new entrants, it will be possible to empirically capture the interactive and iterative dynamics among motivations, conflicts, and strategies over time.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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