

Towards Comprehensive Sexuality Education in the Czech Republic: A Qualitative Study of Practitioners' Perspectives on Key Themes and Methods

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INTRODUCTION: This study explores the perspectives of Czech practitioners on sexuality education (SE) for upper primary school students (ISCED level 2). It focuses on the topics they consider relevant, including those currently underrepresented in school curricula as well as the approaches and methods they apply in practice. The framework of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is used as a lens for interpreting their experiences and practices.

METHODS: Fourteen practitioners participated in two semi-structured focus groups (n = 4 per group, 8 in total) and six individual interviews conducted between November 2023 and June 2024. A pilot focus group tested and refined the wording of the interview questions used in both data collection methods. Data were analysed using a deductive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's approach.

RESULTS: Practitioners emphasized the importance

of addressing not only physical, but also emotional, relational, and digital aspects of SE. The main thematic areas included: boundaries and consent, online sexual risks and harms, reproductive and sexual health, and emotional and psychological well-being. Frequently mentioned topics included changes during adolescence, contraception, consent, sexual rights, exposure to pornography, sexting, and identity. Approaches included breaking taboos, encouraging open discussion and normalization, using interactive and demonstrative techniques, fostering skill-building and attitude-oriented activities, and adapting content to age and context. Access to school-based and external resources was seen as an integral part of effective SE delivery. **CONCLUSIONS:** The findings support the need for a broader, more inclusive SE approach in Czech schools, addressing curriculum gaps, and promoting holistic student development.

Keywords | Comprehensive sexuality education – Sexuality education – Sexual risk prevention – Risky behaviour – Qualitative study – Thematic analysis

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1 INTRODUCTION

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a scientifically grounded, age-appropriate and rights-based approach that integrates biological, psychological, social and ethical dimensions of sexuality. Contemporary CSE frameworks emphasise the development of socio-emotional competencies, positive sexuality, and critical digital literacy, equipping young people with knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for healthy relationships and sexual well-being (Future of Sex Education Initiative, 2020; UNESCO, 2018; WHO & BZgA, 2010).

In many European countries, including Austria, the Netherlands, Finland, Belgium, Sweden and Germany, CSE is systematically embedded in national curricula and supported by teacher training, quality standards and evaluation mechanisms. In contrast, several Central and Eastern European countries, including the Czech Republic, continue to rely on fragmented or inconsistently implemented models, which limits coherence and overall programme quality (BZgA & IPPF EN, 2018; European Parliament, 2022; Ketting et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021). Comparative analyses confirm that such variability is common across Europe. According to the regional BZgA & IPPF EN report (2018, p. 5), “the state of implementation of sexuality education differs widely between and even within countries of the WHO European Region,” with substantial differences in content, depth and teacher preparation persisting even where national sexuality education policies exist.

A large body of international evidence, including systematic reviews covering studies from Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific region, shows that effective CSE combines factual content with interactive, skill-based pedagogies, leading to improved relationship quality, reduced homophobia and intimate partner violence, and fostering gender equality, inclusion and respect for diversity (Abrams et al., 2023; Allen & Carmody, 2012; Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021; Janssens et al., 2020).

In the Czech Republic, CSE or any other form of sexuality education (SE) is not delivered as a stand-alone subject but is dispersed across several components of the national curriculum, particularly within the educational domain Human and Health (upper primary education) and the cross-curricular themes Personal and Social Education and Media Education (MEYS, 2010; WHO & BZgA, 2017). While this model provides schools with a high degree of autonomy, it also results in marked variation in content, depth, quality and time allocation of instruction (Czech High School Union, 2021; MEYS, 2023). The 2025 revision of the Framework Educational Program for Primary Education (Rámcový vzdělávací program, RVP ZV) introduces updated cross-curricular themes, including gender equality, prevention of sexual violence, sexual and gender diversity, the impact of digital media on sexuality and healthy relationships, which align with international recommendations (MEYS, 2025; UNESCO, 2018; WHO & BZgA, 2010). However, due to the fragmented structure of SE within the curriculum and the absence of systematic monitoring or unified implementation guidelines, it remains difficult to assess the extent to which these themes are delivered in practice or whether they achieve the coherence expected in comprehensive CSE models internationally.

Current SE practice in Czech schools continues to emphasize biological aspects such as reproduction, contraception, and STI prevention, while psychosocial and ethical topics, including consent, respect, and a positive approach to sexuality, are often underrepresented (Benešová et al., 2024; Czech High School Union, 2021; Sadková, 2018). Educational materials frequently focus on risk avoidance rather than fostering healthy attitudes toward sexuality (European Commission & Picken, 2020). Instruction relies heavily on lecture-based formats, limiting opportunities for critical thinking and skills development (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021; Sadková, 2018). The lack of evaluative research further impedes the development of evidence-based approaches (Sadvková, 2018).

Digital environments have become a central context for adolescent sexuality, a trend now explicitly reflected in the updated RVP ZV 2025, which highlights the impact of digital media on sexuality and healthy relationships (MEYS, 2025). According to the EU Kids Online study, 34% of Czech adolescents aged 12–17 have received sexually suggestive messages, significantly exceeding the European average of 22%, and approximately 9% have actively sent such messages (Lebedíková, 2024; Šmahel et al., 2020). Sexting is associated with risks such as cyberbullying, extortion, and unauthorized sharing of intimate content (Klettke et al., 2014). Moreover, exposure to pornography begins at increasingly younger ages: a Czech study found that some Czech children encounter pornography as early as six years old (Sejbalová & Martinová, 2021), and 73% of boys and 17% of girls report regular viewing by age 15 (Dolejš et al., 2023). Comparable patterns are seen across Europe. EU Kids Online international data show that between 21% (France) and 50% (Serbia) of children aged 9–16 reported having seen sexual images online in the past year, with the Czech Republic, Spain, Croatia, and Malta among the countries where exposure reaches 40% or more (Šmahel et al., 2020). These trends highlight the growing need for SE to address media literacy, digital consent and resilience to online sexual risks.

Teacher preparedness represents another major challenge in the Czech context. At the national level, the Ministry of Education provides only two outdated resources: *Recommendation for the Implementation of Sexuality Education in Primary Schools* and *Sexual Education: Selected Topics*, which lack methodological guidance and have not been revised since 2010 (MEYS, 2010). As a result, teachers often have to develop their own approaches, and NGOs frequently step in to fill the gap, limiting consistency and sustainability (Czech High School Union, 2021; Sadková, 2018). Czech educators also report insufficient training to address sensitive topics such as gender diversity, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and ethical aspects of sexuality, which negatively impacts classroom climate and inclusivity (O’Farrell et al., 2021; Simons et al., 2021; Smetáčková, 2022). Similar challenges have been documented across Europe (European Parliament, 2022). In the Netherlands, despite a long-established and comprehensive CSE system, actual teaching practices vary widely and depend heavily on individual teachers and schools (van de Bongardt et al., 2013). Similarly, in Ireland, even with a formal Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) curriculum, implementation remains uneven and both in-service and pre-service teachers report insufficient preparation (Keating et al., 2018; Bourke

et al., 2024). Research from outside Europe points to similar patterns. For example, large-scale surveys from the United States show that many teachers feel underprepared to create inclusive and safe environments for LGBTQ+ students (Kosciw et al., 2020), suggesting that gaps in teacher training represent a broader international challenge.

Unlike previous studies that have focused primarily on curricular analysis in the Czech context (Benešová et al., 2024; Sadková, 2018), only limited evidence exists, both nationally and internationally, on how educators actually interpret sexuality education, which priorities they assign to it, and how they implement it in everyday school practice. International reviews highlight that, despite extensive research on programme content and learning outcomes, studies investigating teachers' perspectives and implementation practices remain scarce and fragmented (Janssens et al., 2020; Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). This gap is particularly pronounced in countries where sexuality education is fragmented or inconsistently implemented (e.g., Ireland, Spain, Lithuania, the United Kingdom, Poland), since curricular intentions may diverge substantially from what is delivered in classrooms, a pattern documented in several European contexts (BZgA & IPPF EN, 2018; European Parliament, 2022).

The present study addresses this gap by examining the perspectives of Czech educational practitioners and exploring how they understand current priorities, unmet needs and methodological challenges in sexuality education for upper primary students. The findings contribute to the development and revision of methodological materials, the formulation of evidence-based recommendations, and the improvement of teacher training in accordance with international standards set by UNESCO (2018) and WHO & BZgA (2010).

Given these shortcomings, the study examines how practitioners—teachers, special educators, prevention specialists, school psychologists, and prevention lecturers—perceive current priorities and gaps in SE for upper primary students (ISCED level 2).

RQ1: What topics in SE do practitioners consider relevant for upper primary school students, including those currently overlooked in curricula or practice?

RQ2: What approaches and methods do practitioners use in teaching SE, and how do they assess their effectiveness?

2 METHODS

2.1 Type of research

This qualitative study employed deductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022; Clarke & Braun, 2015) to examine practitioners' perspectives on SE. A deductive approach was selected to examine the extent to which practitioners' experiences and practices reflect the thematic areas outlined in the Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe (WHO & BZgA, 2010), enabling a theory-informed interpretation of real-world educational contexts. The analysis was conducted from a critical realist epistemological perspective, acknowledging both

individual experience and the socio-cultural context (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The study adhered to COREQ guidelines (Tong et al., 2007), with additional methodological details presented in Table 1 (see Annex).

2.2 Participants

Participants ($n = 14$) were selected via purposive and snowball sampling. Recruitment was based on contact information retrieved from the official websites of schools and from the website of an NGO active in sexual risk behaviour prevention. Potential participants were approached via email. The inclusion criteria were: (1) a professional background in pedagogy or psychology, (2) employment in education with direct interaction with upper primary school students (ISCED 2), (3) professional experience in sexuality or relationship education or prevention, and (4) voluntary agreement to participate in the study. Individuals not meeting these criteria were excluded.

Of the 14 participants, 8 took part in two focus groups and 6 participated in individual interviews. They were based in various regions across the Czech Republic. Some worked as external prevention lecturers operating in schools in multiple regions, which further contributed to the regional diversity of perspectives. Age diversity was also considered. Participants had a mean age of 32.50 ± 8.14 years (Min: 25, Max: 47). The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 2.

2.3 Procedure and data collection tools

Data were collected using two qualitative methods: focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews. In both approaches, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow for a deeper understanding of practitioners' perspectives while maintaining flexibility. All interviews—whether in group or individual format—were guided by the same set of six open-ended questions. The interview guide was designed to cover key thematic areas relevant to sexuality education and was informed by the aims of the study, a literature review, and the core domains outlined in CSE frameworks (UNESCO, 2018; WHO & BZgA, 2010). The questions explored practitioners' experiences and perspectives regarding (1) physical development, (2) emotional experience, (3) relationships, (4) the digital environment, (5) help-seeking and available sources of support, and (6) approaches and methods used in sexuality education. These broader thematic prompts enabled participants to reflect on relevant, age-appropriate, and often overlooked topics from their practice. Prior to the main study, a pilot focus group ($n = 4$) was conducted to test and refine the wording of the interview questions.

Participants also responded to a short set of sociodemographic questions covering age, gender, and professional experience. Focus groups captured shared experiences and collective reasoning relevant to school-based practice (Krueger, 2014), while individual interviews offered deeper exploration of sensitive or personally meaningful aspects. The combination of both formats provided a comprehensive understanding of practitioners' perspectives.

Table 2 | Descriptive characteristics of the participants (n=14)

Participant	Gender	Age	Occupation	Degree	Work in Education (Years)	Data Collection Method
P1	Female	26	Special Educator, Researcher in Sexuality Education	Master's	2	FG 1
P2	Female	29	Special Educator, Prevention Lecturer	Master's	6	FG 1
P3	Female	30	Special Educator, Prevention Lecturer	Master's	7	FG 1
P4	Female	30	Prevention Methodologist, Prevention Lecturer	Master's	7	FG 1
P5	Female	25	School Psychologist	Master's	1.5	FG 2
P6	Female	25	School Psychologist, Prevention Lecturer	Master's	1.5	FG 2
P7	Female	45	Prevention Methodologist, Teacher	Master's	20	FG 2
P8	Female	47	Prevention Methodologist, Teacher	Master's	21	FG 2
P9	Female	25	School Psychologist, Prevention Lecturer	Master's	3	In. 1
P10	Female	26	School Psychologist, Prevention Lecturer	Master's	4	In. 2
P11	Male	44	Prevention Methodologist, Teacher	Master's	17	In. 3
P12	Male	33	Prevention Methodologist, Teacher	Master's	7	In. 4
P13	Male	29	School Psychologist	Master's	2	In. 5
P14	Male	41	School Psychologist, Prevention Lecturer	Master's	12	In. 6

Note. FG = focus group; In. = interview

2.4 Data collection

Focus groups and individual interviews were conducted from November 2023 to June 2024 by one researcher in a quiet setting. All sessions were audio-visually recorded with participants' consent. The focus groups lasted 91–101 minutes (median = 96), and individual interviews 50–71 minutes (median = 55). No follow-up interviews were conducted.

2.5 Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. A deductive coding framework was developed prior to coding, drawing on the main domains of CSE defined in UNESCO (2018) and WHO & BZgA (2010). Based on these documents, five overarching content areas were identified: (1) relationships and emotional experience, (2) the physical dimension of sexuality, (3) sexual and reproductive health, (4) the digital environment, and (5) sources of support.

These areas served as an overarching analytical frame for the deductive coding process rather than rigid predefined categories. Within this framework, two independent researchers conducted the coding in Czech. Each researcher first performed open coding individually, using the predefined CSE categories as a guiding structure. Both focus group and interview data were coded using the same procedures within a unified deductive analytical framework. Joint discussions were then held to compare and reconcile codes, during which overlapping or conceptually related codes were merged into broader categories and themes. The themes were subsequently reviewed for internal coherence, semantic consistency, and theoretical relevance, and clearly defined and named.

Participants' quotes (translated from Czech into English by a professional translator) were included to support validity. The analysis was conducted using Condens software.

2.6 Ethical aspects of the research

The study was approved by the Ethics Panel of the Faculty of Arts, Palacký University Olomouc (approval number: 042024), as part of a broader doctoral research project. It was carried out in accordance with national ethical guidelines for social and behavioural research and the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to both the interviews and the focus groups. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to protect their privacy and data confidentiality. For the focus group, informed consent included a confidentiality agreement to ensure that participants would not disclose statements made by other members. All recordings and transcripts were anonymized and securely stored on a password-protected device. Data will be retained for three years following the completion of the study and will then be permanently deleted through secure digital erasure.

3 RESULTS

A thematic analysis identified seven main themes and nineteen sub-themes, capturing key aspects of SE as described by practitioners, including both content areas and methodological considerations. Across both focus groups and individual interviews, the themes showed high consistency. Focus groups tended to generate broader discussions, while individual interviews offered deeper reflections on specific topics and sub-topics. An overview of the themes is presented in Table 3.

3.1 Boundaries and consent

Body awareness was considered essential for adolescents to recognize and interpret bodily signals related to comfort and discomfort. Practitioners emphasized that cultivating bodily awareness as a socio-emotional skill helps young people navi-

Table 3 | Identified Themes and Sub-themes from Thematic Analysis (n = 14)

Relation to RQ	Themes	Sub-themes	n
RQ1: Current topics in SE	Boundaries and consent	Body awareness	8
		Understanding and communicating consent	9
		Relationship boundaries	6
	Online sexual risks and harms	Pornography	11
		Sexting	7
		Comparison with unrealistic beauty standards	5
	Reproductive and sexual health	Physical changes during adolescence	12
		Contraception and sexually transmitted infections	10
		Sexual rights	9
	Emotional and psychological well-being	Personal and sexual identity	10
Diversity and inclusion		8	
RQ2: Approach to SE	Breaking the taboo	Normalization	9
		Open discussion	7
		Age and context-appropriate adaptation	5
	Interactive learning methods	Skill-building activities	10
		Attitude-oriented activities	6
		Demonstrative methods	7
	Access to resources	School-based support services	8
		External organizations	14

Note. RQ = research question

gate personal space and maintain physical and emotional safety in varying contexts, highlighting a dimension that is not directly articulated in current CSE frameworks.

“Guiding adolescents towards better awareness of their own bodies seems very important to me. For me, sexuality is naturally connected to the body – I perceive the psychological and relational aspects of sexuality as something that develops based on what the body signals to us.” (P10, In.)

Understanding and communicating consent was seen as a key skill that goes beyond simply saying “no.” It involves mutual communication, awareness of nonverbal signals, and respect for refusal. Practitioners’ descriptions reflect CSE’s emphasis on consent as an ongoing, relational process grounded in autonomy, communication and mutual respect. Practitioners also called for early and relationship-based education that teaches both giving and receiving consent in a nuanced way.

“The ability to communicate personal boundaries, including how to express them, is important, whether in friendships, romantic relationships, or other types of interactions.” (P7, FG)

Relationship boundaries describe adolescents’ ability to set and maintain healthy limits in relationships. This includes recognizing manipulation or pressure and, beyond what CSE standards explicitly outline, understanding how family background influences relationship expectations. Practitioners emphasized providing students with tools to spot warning signs and the need to discuss what respectful relationships look like.

“Family role models often influence boundaries, and children want to know whether these behaviors are acceptable or cross the line...” (P9, In.)

3.2 Online sexual risks and harms

Pornography was described as commonly accessed by adolescents and a source of distorted views on intimacy, emotional connection, and consent. Practitioners expressed concerns about the normalization of unrealistic portrayals of sexual behaviour and noted the potential for addiction and emotional desensitization. They recommended introducing critical media literacy and, beyond what CSE standards explicitly address, discussions on emotional intimacy to counterbalance these portrayals.

“Pornography is restricted to individuals over 18 for a reason – it doesn’t reflect reality.” (P13, In.)

Sexting poses legal and emotional risks. Participants stressed that many students are unaware of the consequences of sharing intimate content, and highlighted the need to strengthen students’ knowledge of these risks. Beyond the legal risks, they also noted the emotional vulnerability involved, such as peer pressure and the permanence of digital footprints. Educators emphasized the need for adolescents to reflect on both their own and others’ responsibilities before engaging in digital intimacy.

“Many adolescents... are unaware that this behaviour can be legally classified as the distribution of child pornography.” (P12, In.)

Comparison with unrealistic beauty standards affects self-esteem. Practitioners highlighted the pressure created by social media and the constant comparison to idealized images. They advocated for promoting self-acceptance and teaching adolescents to critically evaluate online content.

“Adolescents are under greater pressure because they constantly have others to compare themselves to.” (P2, FG)

3.3 Reproductive and sexual health

Physical changes during adolescence should be addressed inclusively for both genders and linked to psychological development. Practitioners stressed the importance of normalizing bodily development and creating a safe space to ask questions. They also emphasized addressing topics like menstruation and nocturnal emissions in a practical, stigma-free manner, which aligns with CSE principles of promoting dignity and reducing shame.

“It is important not to overlook what happens to boys – such as nocturnal emissions... It would be beneficial to approach this in a way that helps both genders understand the changes they experience.” (P10, FG)

Contraception and sexually transmitted infections are insufficiently covered. A broader understanding of protection methods is needed, including barrier methods, hormonal options, and emergency contraception. Participants recommended ensuring that information is repeated and expanded upon in higher grades.

“The prevention of sexually transmitted infections and early pregnancy is really important because many adolescents have no knowledge about protection options.” (P12, In.)

Sexual rights include informed and autonomous choices. Practitioners noted external and internal pressures that complicate this process, such as media narratives and social expectations. They stressed the need to discuss sexuality within the context of autonomy, agency, and pleasure, not just risk prevention, which in CSE corresponds to supporting values, decision-making, and a positive approach to sexuality.

“Pressure from peers, media, and internal self-imposed pressure play a significant role...” (P2, FG)

3.4 Emotional and psychological well-being

Personal and sexual identity was described as a fluid and evolving process. Adolescents should be supported, not rushed to define themselves. Practitioners recommended that SE provide space for exploration and normalize uncertainty, a need not explicitly articulated in existing CSE frameworks. They also pointed to the Internet as both a resource and a potential risk in this process. In the context of CSE, this points to the importance of supporting adolescents' self-understanding and emotional well-being as their identity develops.

“Adolescents sometimes worry that they need to fit in quickly, but in reality they need time... I keep coming back to normalizing that it is completely okay to feel confused right now and to be figuring out who I actually am.” (P3, FG)

Diversity and inclusion in SE requires scientific grounding and respect for different identities, expressions, and body

types. Self-acceptance and safety in schools were emphasized. Participants stressed the need for educators to receive adequate support and training in addressing LGBTQ+ topics. Participants thus highlighted the need to foster respectful attitudes and emotionally safe school environments, which aligns with CSE principles of non-discrimination.

“We are all different... they [students] appreciate having a space where they can be themselves.” (P11, In.)

3.5 Breaking the taboo

Normalization of sexuality helps reduce shame and risk behaviour. Practitioners emphasized presenting sexuality as a natural part of life and removing unnecessary embarrassment around related topics. This includes normalizing emotional expression, especially among boys, who may face additional societal pressure. The emphasis on normalising emotional expression among boys reflects a nuance that is not explicitly defined in current WHO CSE guidelines.

“...the ability to name one's emotions and normalize them... especially in boys.” (P1, FG)

Open discussion and terminological accuracy foster trust and reduce stigma. Providing correct anatomical terms and a judgment-free environment were described as crucial to building students' confidence.

“Terminological accuracy helps students gain distance from feelings of shame and perceive sexuality as something natural.” (P9, In.)

Age and context-appropriate adaptation ensures accessibility and relevance, accounting for cognitive and emotional maturity. Practitioners noted that even within upper primary grades, students differ significantly in their readiness and exposure.

“In 6th and 9th grade... I see a big difference in their development. The younger they are, the more the program, needs to be adjusted – not just the content, but also the terminology.” (P9, In.)

3.6 Interactive learning methods

Skill-building activities, such as role-plays and case studies, help develop communication, assertiveness, and decision-making. Practitioners praised the experiential aspect of these methods and emphasized that students retain more when learning is active and participatory.

“Students try out desirable behaviour directly, which has a huge impact.” (P7, FG)

Attitude-oriented activities include debunking myths and discussing ethical dilemmas to develop critical thinking and values. These promote open reflection and help students question societal norms.

“Using stories to illustrate moral dilemmas works well... students engage by expressing their opinions about the characters and reflecting on the situations presented.” (P10, In.)

Demonstrative methods such as anatomical models and hands-on tools improve understanding and retention. Visual aids, physical models, and step-by-step demonstrations were seen as highly effective.

“We receive very positive feedback on hands-on demonstrations, such as practicing putting on a condom.” (P8, FG)

Some participants emphasized the value of reflection after experiential activities and varying tasks to keep students engaged. They also recommended mixed-gender group work and stressed the need for a safe environment where opting out is respected. Although interactive and participatory methods align with core CSE principles, these practice-based insights extend existing frameworks by highlighting the importance of structured reflection, intentional group composition, and respecting students' right to opt out.

3.7 Access to resources

School-based support services should be accessible and inclusive. Students often seek help from school staff but also need guidance in navigating family conversations. Practitioners recommended providing information on how to start such discussions and emphasized the value of having both male and female staff available, a consideration not typically specified in CSE standards.

“They often search for information online... but still need someone real to confide in.” (P5, FG)

External organizations provide specialized help. Participants recommended increasing student awareness and the visibility of these resources, suggesting posters, online directories, and classroom integration of available supports.

“We compile a network of contacts with students, which they can turn to when needed.” (P12, In.)

4 DISCUSSION

The study explored both the content and overlooked areas of SE, as well as the teaching approaches and methods that practitioners consider effective in the Czech context, where CSE is not yet systematically implemented. The findings revealed seven interconnected themes and 19 sub-themes. Four themes addressed current SE content (RQ1): Boundaries and Consent, Online Sexual Risks and Harms, Reproductive and Sexual Health, and Emotional and Psychological Well-being. Three themes captured effective teaching approaches and methods (RQ2): Breaking the Taboo, Interactive Learning Methods, and Access to Resources (see Table 3).

Practitioners emphasized that SE should address consent as a dynamic and context-dependent socio-emotional skill, not limited to sexual interactions. Adolescents have to learn not only to give and refuse consent but also to recognize coercion and manipulation. These findings support previous research highlighting the need for interactive, reflective, and context-sensitive consent education (Allen & Carmody, 2012; Burton et al., 2021; Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021; Janssens et al., 2020). Inadequate attention to this topic increases the risk that young people may misinterpret or overlook problematic relationship dynamics. Our findings further extend current CSE frameworks by highlighting the importance of reading bodily signals as a competence that helps adolescents navigate personal space and maintain physical and emotional safety, as well as understanding how family background shapes expectations in relationships.

Digital environments introduce additional challenges. Participants identified pornography, sexting, and body image as major concerns. Early exposure to pornography can distort adolescents' views of sexuality and relationships, often omitting emotional intimacy and consent (Dolejš et al., 2023; Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021; Sejbálová & Martinová, 2021; Vera-Gray, 2021). Our findings further suggest that, beyond what current CSE frameworks explicitly recommend, sexuality education should incorporate discussions of emotional and sexual intimacy to counterbalance the distorted portrayals found in online pornography. Sexting remains common but misunderstood; adolescents often lack awareness of the legal and emotional consequences (European Parliament, 2022; Klettke et al., 2014; Šmahel et al., 2020). Social media comparisons with idealized bodies negatively affect self-esteem (McComb et al., 2023). These findings reinforce international calls for SE to include critical media literacy and strategies to resist digital pressures (Crabbe & Flood, 2021; Crabbe et al., 2024; Goldstein, 2019).

Although our data do not allow for a full assessment of how comprehensively sexuality education is currently delivered, partly due to system fragmentation and the considerable autonomy schools have in adapting its content, our findings suggest several areas in which reproductive and sexual health may be insufficiently addressed in practice. Practitioners stressed the need for education that integrates the physical, psychological, and relational aspects of adolescence. According to practitioners, current classroom practice often focuses narrowly on condoms and pills, overlooking other methods and broader sexual health themes, including bodily changes, menstruation, nocturnal emissions, and a wider range of contraceptive methods. They also emphasized the importance of providing a stigma-free space for both genders. This aligns with global findings that CSE yields better health outcomes than abstinence-only approaches (Ketting et al., 2021; Santelli et al., 2017). The results also underscore the influence of peer norms and media on adolescents' sexual decision-making within the domain of sexual rights. Participants agreed that sexuality should be discussed in the context of autonomy, personal agency, and pleasure, which corresponds to the positive approach to sexuality promoted in CSE frameworks (Abrams et al., 2023; Lameiras-Fernández et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2018; van de Bongardt et al., 2015; WHO & BZgA, 2010).

Emotional and psychological well-being was considered essential. Adolescents should explore identity without pressure to self-label. Practitioners highlighted the role of safe environments and supportive adults in promoting mental health and self-acceptance (Allen & Carmody, 2012; Future of Sex Education Initiative, 2020; WHO & BZgA, 2010). They also noted the need for sexuality education to provide space for exploration and to normalise uncertainty, a need not explicitly articulated in current CSE frameworks. The findings also reflect ongoing challenges with inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics in schools and the lack of methodological support for educators. These challenges are echoed in international literature and underscore the importance of fostering respectful attitudes and emotionally safe school climates, consistent with CSE principles of non-discrimination (Bourke et al., 2024; Janssens et al., 2020; O'Farrell, 2021; UNESCO, 2018).

Breaking the taboo was repeatedly emphasized. Practitioners reported that normalization of sexuality, especially emotional expression in boys, helps reduce shame and stigma. This emphasis reflects an important nuance that is not explicitly defined in current CSE guidelines. Using accurate terminology in open, judgment-free discussion improves comfort and understanding (European Parliament, 2022; Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). They also stressed the need for content to be developmentally and contextually tailored—accounting for age, regional variations, and students' lived experiences (UNESCO, 2018; Ketting et al., 2020; WHO & BZgA, 2010).

Interactive methods were considered essential for building competencies. Practitioners recommended skill-based activities (e.g., role plays), attitude-oriented tasks (e.g., ethical dilemmas), and demonstrative tools (e.g., condom demonstrations). These approaches align with Vygotsky's social constructivism and the research of Janssens et al. (2020), Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021), and Abrams et al. (2023), which show that experiential learning enhances retention and behavioural application. Additional recommendations included ensuring safety, reflection, mixed-gender collaboration, and content variety and respecting students' autonomy to opt out. Although these practices are consistent with core CSE principles (UNESCO, 2018; WHO & BZgA, 2010), they extend existing frameworks by emphasising the practical importance of reflection, group organisation, and voluntary participation.

Finally, access to resources was a key concern. Practitioners stressed the importance of visible school-based support and collaboration with external organizations. Adolescents need access to trusted adults, including both male and female staff and guidance on how to initiate sensitive discussions, an aspect not typically specified in CSE frameworks, as well as crisis services

and regional networks. This aligns with findings by Simons et al. (2021), Janssens et al. (2020), and Lameiras-Fernández et al. (2021), which recommend building supportive ecosystems for SE.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample size ($n = 14$) is relatively small and captures only part of the spectrum of perspectives held by educational practitioners. The combination of focus groups and individual interviews may also have influenced the nature of the data obtained, as the dynamics of group discussions sometimes amplified topics that were not considered priority issues during subsequent individual reflection. This distinction between what becomes “visible” in a group setting and what practitioners identify as genuinely important represents a valuable methodological insight for future research combining focus groups and individual interviews.

The sample consisted exclusively of practitioners, and the use of purposive and snowball sampling may have introduced selection bias, as some participants were already professionally engaged in or supportive of comprehensive sexuality education. In addition, several areas emphasized in international CSE frameworks appeared only marginally in participants' accounts, for example pleasure as part of sexual well-being, sexuality in the context of disability, or the influence of socioeconomic circumstances on sexual decision-making. These silences point to content areas that warrant further exploration.

The findings of this study are exploratory and should be interpreted within the specific context of the Czech educational environment. Nevertheless, the identified thematic areas correspond to international debates on the implementation of CSE, suggesting that some challenges may be shared across different educational systems.

Future research should include a broader and more diverse pool of participants, incorporate the perspectives of students and parents, and further examine how educators work with topics that are perceived as sensitive in school or public settings, and how they assign meaning to them in their professional practice.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Our findings have several practical implications for schools and educational policy. They can serve as recommendations for educational policymakers when developing or refining the content of SE, as they highlight which topics and competencies (approaches and methods) practitioners consider relevant or currently underrepresented in practice. Practitioners agreed

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that effective sexuality education must explicitly develop a core set of socio-emotional skills related to boundary-setting, consent, and communication, which are essential for adolescents' safe functioning in both offline and online environments. In the Czech educational context, these elements are already partially embedded in the curriculum, yet within sexuality education it may be useful to clarify which competencies should be systematically developed and how they can be integrated into everyday practice.

The data also highlight specific teacher competencies. These include the ability to create psychologically safe learning environments, facilitate open discussions on sensitive topics, navigate issues related to digital sexuality, and support diverse student identities without reinforcing stigma. The lack of methodological materials and training opportunities therefore points to the need to strengthen both pre-service preparation and ongoing professional development, particularly in discussion facilitation, working with taboo topics, and managing emotional dynamics in the classroom.

The implementation of SE programs may also benefit from simple and feasible evaluation strategies. Although evaluation was not the focus of this study, the emphasis practitioners placed on tailoring content to students' age and needs and ensuring psychological safety suggests that regular feedback from students, teachers, or external educators could help schools monitor the relevance and acceptability of instruction within ordinary school capacities. Such low-threshold approaches may support the continuous improvement of programs.

Finally, participants pointed to the value of accessible services and regional networks. External organizations can supplement school-based support with specialized expertise. Ensuring that such collaboration is well coordinated and reliably available over time may enhance continuity of support and improve the coherence of preventive efforts.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study captured Czech school practitioners' views on essential topics and effective teaching approaches and methods in SE. Their perspectives demonstrate that SE must integrate socio-emotional competencies, particularly those related to boundaries, consent, and communication, with topics such as online risks and harms, reproductive and sexual health including sexual rights, and emotional and psychological well-being, including support for identity, diversity, and inclusion. Practitioners also highlighted the value of normalisation, open dialogue, and interactive, student-centred pedagogies, while pointing to systemic barriers such as insufficient training and limited methodological support. Taken together, these findings underscore the need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to SE that addresses both individual competencies and the broader institutional conditions under which SE is delivered. The study provides direction for strengthening SE programs and designing prevention strategies that are responsive to adolescents' lived experiences.

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ANNEX 1

Table 1 | Combined criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ)

Number	Characteristics	Guiding questions	Explanations
Domain 1: Research team and reflexivity			
Personal Characteristics			
1	Interviewer/facilitator	Which authors conducted the interview or focus group?	The first author conducted the interview and focus group.
2	Credentials	What were the credentials of the researchers? e.g., Ph.D., MD	First author: Master of Arts (MA), Second author: Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)
3	Occupation	What was their occupation during the study?	First author: Ph.D. student, Psychologist, Second author: Associate Professor, Faculty Member, Psychologist
4	Gender	What was the sex of the researcher?	First author: Female, Second author: Male
5	Experience and education	What are the experiences and education levels of the researchers?	The first author has taken qualitative courses, has experience in qualitative research. The second author taken qualitative courses, has experience in qualitative research.
Relationship with participants			
6	Relationship status	Was there a relationship between the researcher and the participants before the training?	No, there was not.
7	Interviewee's information about the interviewer	What did the participants know about the researcher, e.g., personal goals and reasons for doing the research?	Participants knew that the researcher was a Ph.D. student. They knew in advance the purpose of the research.
8	Interviewee characteristics	What characteristics of the interviewer/facilitator were reported? e.g., bias, assumptions, reasons, and interests in research	At the beginning of each interview and focus group, the participants were informed about the aim and objectives of the study.
Domain 2: Study Design			
Theoretical framework			
9	Methodological orientation and theory	What methodological orientation was identified to support the study, e.g., discourse analysis, ethnography, phenomenology, and content analysis?	It was a qualitative study (deductive thematic analysis).
Sampling			
10	Sampling	How were the participants selected? e.g., purposeful, convenience, consecutive, snowball.	Purposive sampling methods and snowball sampling were used. Inclusive selection criteria have been established.
11	Approach method	How were the participants reached? e.g., face-to-face, telephone, mail.	Participants were reached by email and social media.
12	Sample size	How many participants were there in the study?	A total of 14 individuals were included in the study.
13	Exclusion	How many people refused to participate or dropped out? Reasons?	One participant chose not to participate due to the distance of the interview location.
Setting			
14	The setting of data collection	Where were the data collected? e.g., home, clinic, or workplace	Detailed information is given in the data collection section of the study.
15	Presence of non-participants	Was there anyone else other than the participants and the researchers?	No, there was not.
16	Description of the sample	What are the important characteristics of the sample? e.g., demographic data, date	Participants were chosen based on predefined criteria. Demographically, the participants were from various parts of the Czech Republic.
Data collection			
17	Interview guide	Were questions, prompts, and guidelines provided by the authors? Were they tested in a pilot study?	Detailed information was given in the Methods section.

Number	Characteristics	Guiding questions	Explanations
18	Repeat interviews	Were repeated interviews conducted? If yes, how many?	No, they were not.
19	Audio/visual recording	Were audio recordings or visual recordings used to collect data in the research?	Both individual interviews and focus groups were audio-visually recorded.
20	Field notes	Were field notes taken during and/or after the interview or focus group?	Notes were taken during individual interviews and focus groups.
21	Duration	How long were the interviews or focus groups?	Individual interviews lasted between 50 and 71 minutes. Focus Groups lasted between 91 and 101 minutes.
22	Data saturation	Was data saturation discussed?	Yes, it was.
23	Transcripts returned	Were transcripts returned to participants for comment and/or correction?	Yes, they were.
Domain 3: Analysis and results			
24	Number of data coders	How many data coders coded the data?	Both authors coded the data.
25	Description of the coding tree	Did the authors describe the coding tree?	The titles and subtitles in the results section represent the final coding tree.
26	Derivation of themes	Were the themes predetermined or derived from the data?	Themes were predetermined based on Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe (WHO & BZgA, 2010).
27	Software	If any, what software was used to manage the data?	Condens software was used.
28	Participant control	Did participants provide feedback on the findings?	No, they did not.
Reporting			
29	Quotations provided	Are participant quotes cited to illustrate themes/ findings? Is each quote identified, e.g., by participant number?	Yes, they are. Participant quotes are provided to illustrate themes/findings. e.g., participant number
30	Data and findings consistent	Was there consistency between the data presented and the findings?	Yes, there was.
31	Clarity of main themes	Are the main themes clearly presented in the findings?	Yes, they are.
32	Clarity of subthemes	Is there a description of the different cases or a discussion of minor issues?	Yes, there is.

