



Research Article

An ecosystemic analysis of resistance to and advocacy for involvement in comprehensive sexuality education: Sub-Saharan Africa example

Angellar Manguvo¹

University of Missouri-Kansas City, Missouri, USA

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Abstract

Over the last two decades, there has been a global push to scale up Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). However, this educational framework has often been approached from Euro-American perspectives, overlooking the distinct cultures and traditions that shape how SSA perceives, defines, and educates about sexuality. Notwithstanding significant progress in the past decade, this paper primarily focuses on implementation challenges and resistance to CSE in SSA. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of human development, the author offers a nuanced analysis of interconnected factors, including Afro-centric philosophical worldviews, indigenous modes of sexuality education, cultural traditions, religious practices, and more, which impede the proper implementation of CSE at various ecological systems. The author concludes by advocating for a collective engagement model across the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem levels. Additionally, the author emphasizes the need to establish common ground for effective and culturally sensitive sexuality education programs in SSA. In conclusion, this paper modestly contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding the acceptance of CSE in SSA.

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Introduction

Sexuality is a multifaceted concept encompassing dimensions such as sex, sexual orientation, gender roles and identities, eroticism, intimacy, and reproduction, as outlined by the UNESCO (2018). Understanding these various aspects is a lifelong process that commences in childhood and unfolds through adolescence into adulthood. This paper initiates with a global perspective on Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) before focusing on sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of human development, the paper explores challenges in CSE implementation within SSA, examining the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem ecological levels. The analysis delves into how African philosophical worldviews, cultural traditions, indigenous modes of sexuality education, religion, media, and more are interwoven within each ecological system, forming significant resistance to CSE. The paper aims to address and mitigate this resistance by proposing a collective engagement model across all levels of ecological systems to establish common ground. The diagram below offers a visual representation of an exosystemic approach in comprehending the intricacies of resistance to CSE and promoting system-wide collaborative initiatives to mitigate the resistance.

¹ Associate Teaching Professor: Dpt. of Grad. Health Professions in Medicine, Assistant Dean for the Learning Environment & Educational Program Manager, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Missouri, USA. E-mail: manguvoa@umkc.edu

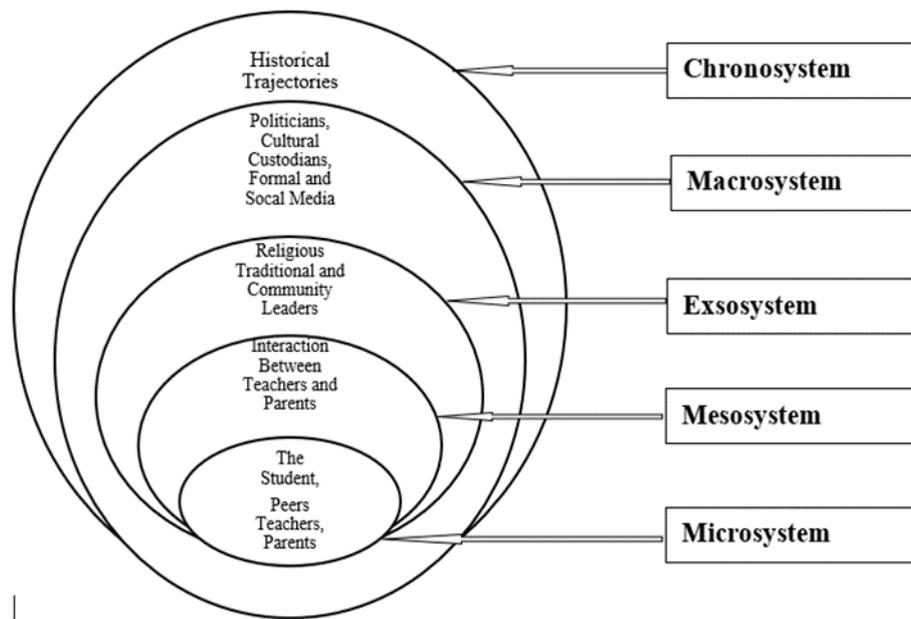


Figure 1. Exosystemic approach of comprehending and promoting system-wide collaborative initiatives to mitigate resistance to CSE.

CSE, as defined by UNESCO (2018), is a curriculum-based process that involves teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social dimensions of sexuality. It emerged as a response to the need for a comprehensive approach to sexuality education that extends beyond conventional models focused solely on reproductive biology. The curriculum addresses a range of topics, including gender relations, HIV/AIDS prevention, sexually transmitted infections, and emotional responsibilities related to sexuality (Herman et al., 2013). Notably, it also incorporates discussions on gender identity, sexual orientation, consent, and prevention of dating violence (Woolweaver et al., 2023). According to UNESCO, CSE aims to empower children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable them to realize the importance of their sexual health, well-being, and dignity. It emphasizes the development of respectful social and sexual relationships and encourages consideration of the impact of choices on personal well-being and that of others. In collaboration with other agencies, UNESCO (2018) developed the *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education*, providing guidance to stakeholders involved in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating CSE.

A well designed and properly implemented CSE has demonstrated positive outcomes across various domains. For instance, a growing body of evidence supports the effectiveness of CSE in HIV and pregnancy prevention. Researchers from different parts of the world have also revealed broader positive outcomes, including advancements in gender equality, self-efficacy, and critical thinking (Haberland & Rogow, 2015; Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2016).

Global Commitments to Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Given its perceived effectiveness, CSE has garnered a lot of global attention. The International Conference on Population and Development Program of Action, held in Cairo in 1994, was among the first to acknowledge the significance of integrating sexuality education into formal education. The subsequent year, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasized the need for CSE to address the specific needs of women and girls. In 2010, UNAIDS established a Global Review Panel, recognizing CSE as being aligned with broader goals for HIV/AIDS prevention. CSE also aligns with certain United Nations Sustainable Development and Millennium Development Goals, both of which are aimed at enhancing people's overall health and well-being.

Global organizations have actively collaborated with governmental and non-governmental entities and civil society to scale up the implementation of CSE in schools. According to UNESCO (2023), 85% of the 155 nations reviewed in 2021 had policies supportive of CSE. However, a comparative review of a selected sample of 50 countries globally revealed substantial variations in actual implementation. Different countries covered a wide array of topics differently, with fewer than 20% addressing LGBTQIA+ and sexual orientation topics.

Sexuality education remains a topic of controversy and debate, often influenced by cultural, religious, and political factors. In the United States, for instance, CSE curriculum is determined at the state level, resulting in considerable variability among states in both content and approach. According to the Guttmacher Institute (2023), approximately half of the US states mandate the teaching of sexuality, HIV education, and contraception options in public schools, while others emphasize abstinence. Some states require the curriculum to be inclusive of gender identity and sexual orientations, while other states stress the importance of heterosexuality.

Method

Research Paradigm

The transformative research paradigm provided guidance for this study as its inherent assumptions align with the research objectives. According to Mertens (2016), one of the proponents of the transformative paradigm, the axiological assumptions within this paradigm focus on prioritizing the voices of the disadvantaged. Regarding ontology, the understanding of reality is contextualized within political, cultural, and socioeconomic value systems (Romm, 2015). Epistemologically, the transformative research paradigm underscores the importance of comprehending historical and social contexts surrounding phenomena, fostering relationships that recognize power differentials, and cultivating trust among involved parties (Mertens, 2016).

A pivotal assumption within the transformative research paradigm is its emphasis on empowerment and human agency. Another crucial characteristic is the paradigm's commitment to social justice, challenging discriminatory practices, promotion of inclusivity, and recognition of diverse perspectives (Mertens, 2016). In light of these assumptions, the transformative research paradigm was deemed appropriate to guide the examination of resistance to CSE with an advocacy for collaborative engagement. The ultimate goal of the study is to instigate a paradigm shift that fosters social change, empowerment, and the transformation of existing norms and practices within the realm of sexuality education.

Research Model

What distinguishes the transformative research paradigm, particularly from a methodological standpoint, is its flexibility to accommodate any research method, as long as it aligns with the paradigm's underlying assumptions (Mertens, 2016). The present study employs a historical research method. The approach involves a thorough examination of the development and evolution of sexuality education over time in SSA, uncovering historical contexts, cultural influences, and societal attitudes that have influenced the trajectories.

The study adheres to Lundy's (2008) five-stage framework for historical research. That said, the exploration commences with the identification of the research phenomenon: resistance to CSE. The subsequent stage, as per Lundy's guidance, encompasses the formulation of research objectives and the selection of a guiding theoretical perspective. The chosen theoretical framework is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of human development. Following this, per Lundy's recommendation, the next stage involves the exploration of pertinent data, succeeded by the analysis of the collected evidence. The last stage is the presentation and interpretation of findings. Ultimately, utilizing a historical approach into the critical analysis of resistance to CSE brought about profound understanding of the concept of resistance to CSE.

Data Sources and Collection Procedures

Historical research predominantly relies on primary data. That said, this study utilized existing documents as the primary sources of data. As Atkinson and Coffey (1997) characterize, documents are 'social facts' that offer a tangible means for tracing background information, historical insights, and the evolution of the studied phenomenon. Academic research studies and reports from health organizations evaluating CSE implementation in SSA constituted the core documents. Additionally, the researcher analyzed national legislations and educational policies delineating CSE integration in school curricula from various countries. The inclusion of formal media articles and discussions on social media platforms addressing CSE further diversified the array of analyzed documents. This diverse compilation of documents provided a

nanced understanding of the historical and socio-cultural contexts influencing the conceptualization and implementation of CSE in various countries within SSA.

Data Analysis

Data analyses was guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of human development. With its five nested systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem), the theory provided a framework to examine the interplay of various elements shaping individuals' perceptions of CSE within their immediate and broader environments. The theory also offered a structured and comprehensive approach to understanding the multifaceted factors that influence resistance to CSE.

Results

The subsequent sections of this paper will present the contextual details derived from the analysis of the chosen documents. Each subsection delves into the intricacies encapsulated within these documents, thus, unraveling the complexities surrounding the notion of resistance to CSE in SSA. Overall, the findings enrich the discourse on resistance to CSE by providing valuable insights for an informed paradigm shift.

The Urgent Need for Sexuality Education in SSA

While the global need for CSE is evident, the specific challenges and health indicators in SSA emphasize the critical importance of adapting and scaling up CSE programs in the region. It is, however, crucial to recognize the incredible diversity within SSA, where each country and often each region within a country, possesses unique ethnicities, languages, and cultural traditions. Economic conditions vary, with some states experiencing rapid growth while others face economic challenges. Political stability also differs across countries. Meanwhile, the religious landscape encompasses a mix of traditional indigenous religions, Christianity, Islam, and other faiths. Discussing sexuality education in SSA, therefore, requires an awareness of these heterogeneities. Despite this diversity, this paper treats SSA as an integrative region with shared commonalities.

One such commonality is the region's predominantly young population. According to UNESCO (2021), 32% of the population in SSA is between the ages of 10 and 24. Sub-Saharan African countries also share similar healthcare challenges. A significant concentration of people living with HIV is found in this region. Despite accounting for only about 13% of the world's population, SSA represented approximately 67% of new HIV infections in 2021 (UNAIDS, 2022). As UNAIDS further highlights, youth aged 15-24 constitute the highest-risk age group, with the majority of infections. Notably, girls aged 15-19 disproportionately account for six in seven new HIV infections. The region also grapples with high rates of teenage pregnancies, estimated at 15-25%, ranking among the highest globally (UNESCO, 2021). Given these statistics, the urgency of CSE cannot be overstated.

Initiatives and Efforts on Sexuality Education in SSA

Confronted with these stark statistics, several continental and regional organizations in SSA have committed to CSE. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women pioneered the advocacy for incorporating CSE into school curricula in 2003. A decade later, the momentum for a more systematic scaling up of CSE was revitalized as 20 African countries signed the *Ministerial Commitment on CSE and Sexual and Reproductive Health Services for Adolescents and Young People in Eastern and Southern Africa*. The agreement aimed to facilitate the adaptation and implementation of CSE. This was also seen as an integral measure to combat HIV among youth (UNESCO, 2021). The initiative received support from both the Southern African Development Community and the East African Community.

In subsequent years, CSE has consistently gained recognition. In 2019, 14 ministers of education and of health from different countries in SSA participated in a dialogue initiated by UNESCO in Ghana, centered on sexuality education. Similar endeavors were undertaken in 2023 when delegates from 33 African countries, including government officials and civil society organizations, devised the "*Our Rights Our Lives Our Future*" program in Zanzibar, Tanzania. The program's focus was on developing strategies for providing young people with high-quality, accurate, cultural, and rights-based education on health and well-being (UNESCO, 2023).

Challenges in Implementing and Adapting CSE in SSA

In keeping with the commitment by continental organizations, numerous countries in SSA have made notable progress, particularly in formulating relevant policies to integrate CSE into school curricula. As Manguvo and Nyanungo (2018) observed, what initially started as HIV prevention curricula in most countries evolved into CSE. However, member states find themselves at different stages of implementation, with varied content coverage.

A review conducted by UNESCO (2021) encompassing 24 countries in SSA assessed the ‘comprehensiveness’ of content based on international guidelines, assigning cumulative average scores categorized as latent (<25%), emerging (25-50%), established (50-75%), or advanced (>75%). The majority of countries scored in the latent or emerging categories. In a related study, Chawhanda et al. (2021) evaluated CSE provision in schools across six countries in Southern Africa from the perspectives of learners and teachers. While basic education policies in all six countries aligned with international guidelines, full implementation remained incomplete. Examining sexuality education programs in Ghana, Malawi, Burundi, Zambia, and Kenya, Vanwesenbeeck et al. (2015) also reported intentional omissions or abbreviations of certain topics. Meanwhile, a study by Wekesah (2019) revealed that teachers in SSA often resort to fear-based and risk-focused communication in sexuality education. All these studies point to widespread inadequacies and variations in implementing CSE in SSA.

The obstacles to effective implementation of CSE in SSA are indeed intricate and multifaceted. As UNFPA (2015) submits, barriers encompass the absence of clear frameworks for translating policies into practice, lack of coordination, weak regulation and supervision, inadequacy of well-trained teachers, and shortage of technical and financial resources. While the significance of these factors, whether considered individually or collectively, is undeniable, it is noteworthy that resistance persists even in schools where financial and human resources are conducive. The following sections will provide a dimension to the ongoing discourse by delving into the concept of resistance to CSE through the lens of an Afrocentric ecological systems theoretical framework.

Resistance to Sexuality Education

The widespread resistance to CSE in SSA is not merely an individual effort but is deeply rooted within broader social contexts. As stated earlier, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory of human development offers valuable insights into unraveling the intricacies of this resistance. The theory delineates nested but interconnected systems that influence children, spanning from the microsystem, where children engage with immediate environments like family, peers, and school, to the mesosystem, involving interactions between these microsystems. The exosystem encompasses external factors such as community and faith-based organizations, while the macrosystem incorporates elements like government laws and policies, cultural traditions, and the media. The chronosystem acknowledges the impact of historical changes and transitions over time. Crucially, there is reciprocity between the child and the systems, where factors within each system can directly or indirectly influence the child, and vice versa (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Applying the ecological systems theory not only enhances comprehension of the intricate dynamics surrounding resistance to CSE but also offers a valuable framework for fostering collaborative initiatives to address this resistance. In this process, involving stakeholders across diverse ecological systems is a pivotal step. This may involve open communication, focused activities, learning forums, and in-person meetings to secure stakeholder buy-in. The remainder of this paper will explore the intricacies of resistance to CSE in SSA at each ecological systems level, followed by recommendations for fostering intra and inter-level collaborative engagements to mitigate the resistance.

The Microsystem

The microsystem, a foundational component in ecological systems theory, refers to the immediate environments where children interact and directly experience their daily lives. Understanding this level’s needs and resistance to CSE is vital for effective implementation.

The Student and Peers

The primary stakeholder at the microsystem level is the intended recipient of the curriculum, the student as well as their peers. Studies conducted in various parts of SSA uncovered a noticeable disconnect between CSE content and local needs. For instance, in a series of focus groups with Tanzanians aged 18-34, Coultas et al. (2020) found that the most

recurrent perception was that much of the CSE content was ‘not for us.’ Similarly, a study with South African adolescents identified masculinity as a prioritized theme, yet it is not emphasized in CSE content (Pattman & Bhana 2017). This illustrates a widespread belief that CSE is not addressing local needs.

The reasons for students’ resistance to CSE are multifaceted. While most needs of the youth are universal, understanding and engaging with the local needs, priorities, and perspectives when designing the curriculum is vital (Mukoro, 2017). For example, designing the Yathu Yathu (For Us, By Us) project in Zambia involved significant contributions from the youth, thereby empowering them to take ownership of the project (Simuyaba, 2021). This is a practical roadmap to combat resistance from the intended recipients. Additionally, collaborative effort on preferred delivery strategies is also key to the acceptability of CSE.

Teachers

Teachers emerge as the most critical determinants of the success of CSE. Their perceptions and commitment significantly influence students’ attitudes. Furthermore, teachers’ competence in content delivery directly impacts students’ understanding of the concepts. Despite their crucial role, research has depicted teachers in SSA as hesitant to teach CSE. In Zimbabwe, for example, primary school teachers reported feeling ‘uncomfortable’ teaching certain content due to cultural restrictions (Matswetu & Bhana, 2023). Similarly, teachers in Lesotho reportedly omitted topics perceived as divergent from their own values (Khau, 2012). Comparable findings were reported in Ethiopia (Miedema et al., 2020), Uganda (Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2016), and Kenya (Sidze et al., 2017). Considering their direct influence on students’ microsystem and their trusted position as credible sources of information, teachers’ attitudes can easily influence students’ perception of CSE. Moreover, the success of any curriculum heavily relies on teachers’ willingness, commitment, and ability to deliver. Their reluctance is, therefore, a significant impediment to proper implementation of CSE. For this reason, Ahmed et al. (2022) have recommended careful selection of CSE teachers based on aptitudes, willingness, and commitment.

Parents

Presuming all teachers were committed to properly teaching CSE, parents, another immediate and direct influence in the students’ microsystem, pose another formidable resistance force, acting outside the school system. Research conducted in various parts of SSA has highlighted this resistance. For instance, studies by Francis (2013) and Mturi and Bechuke (2019) reported South African teachers encountering resistance from parents. Studies conducted in Ghana and Gambia also revealed many parents expressing unfavorable attitudes toward CSE (Kah, 2021; Nyarko, 2014). A meta-analysis by Shibuya et al. (2023) revealed similar negative attitudes from parents in various sub-Saharan African countries.

The Mesosystem

The mesosystem denotes the interactions between the child’s microsystem components, particularly focusing on the interplay between teachers and parents. Successful implementation of CSE requires buy-in from all immediate and direct microsystem environments of the student. Harmonious relationships promote effective provision, while discordant relationships can be detrimental. Enhancing the mesosystem involves fostering open communication and promoting collaboration between teachers and parents. The approach incorporates parents’ perspectives and values, addressing their concerns, and fostering a sense of ownership. For instance, in Ethiopia, parents were engaged, leading to a recommendation to restructure the curriculum to include abstinence-only programs at primary school and abstinence-plus programs at the secondary school level (Fentahun et al., 2012). Involving parents enables them to support and reinforce key concepts at home, thus, contributing to a more comprehensive learning experience for students. Collaborative engagement also bridges the gap between the home and the school. It also prevents confusion arising from conflicting teachings. Ultimately, parent-teacher collaboration significantly mitigates resistance to CSE.

The Exosystem

The exosystem, encompassing social settings that children do not directly experience, also significantly influences the provision of CSE. Elements within the exosystem include leaders of school boards, custodians of indigenous forms of sexuality education, and leaders of faith-based institutions.

Guardians of Indigenous Sexuality Education

During the pre-colonial era, ethnicities in SSA had indigenous forms of sexuality education. These involved separate teachings for boys and girls to prepare them for their respective adult roles, often celebrated through rite of passage ceremonies. Despite being vilified during the missionary and the colonial eras, these traditional modes have remained tenacious (Miskinzod, 2023). Examples include the *Bogwera* in Botswana, *Chinamwali* among the Chewa people of Malawi and Zambia, the *Emuratare* among the Maasai people of Kenya and Tanzania, and the *Poro* among the Senufo people in Ivory Coast, Mali, and Burkina Faso (Schroeder et al., 2022).

While indigenous sexuality education and CSE may share certain aspects, conflicts arise in others. For instance, the emphasis on gender equality in CSE conflicts with traditional gender roles and stereotypes. In many rites of passage, girls are taught 'feminine' roles while boys are instructed on how to 'act like a man.' This dissonance is revealed from a study discussed earlier, where South African youth identified masculinity as the most prioritized theme in sexuality education, and yet, the topic is not covered in the CSE curriculum (Pattman & Bhana 2017). Malawian youth also reported of the confusion emanating from contradictory gender role teachings from school and community elders (Likupe et al., 2020).

Successful CSE implementation, therefore, requires understanding and recognition of existing indigenous patterns of sexuality education. There is a need to acknowledge the culture specific wisdoms embedded in some aspects of the indigenous models of sexuality education. Affirming non-harmful aspects while challenging harmful gender norms, when necessary, may be an effective roadmap to finding common ground. It may also be necessary to revamp traditional approaches to sexuality education to align them with the demands of modern times.

Guardians of Faith, Spirituality, and Belief Systems

Leaders of the various belief systems inherent in various religions and faiths also pose as strong resistance forces to CSE. Many schools in SSA were established by missionaries, as such, they incorporate religious education into the curriculum to instill good morals (Mahoso et al., 2022). Consequently, resistance to and even prohibition of CSE by the leaders is prevalent (Chavula, 2022). Some have even advocated integrating CSE into the religious education curriculum (Bweyale & Sekaye, 2023). Collaborative engagement at the exosystem level must, therefore, involve religious, traditional, and community leaders. This collaborative approach has reportedly been proven key to successful implementation in some states in Nigeria (Kunnuji, 2017).

The Macrosystem

Macro-level resistance to CSE encompasses opposition occurring at broader societal or systemic levels, including political ideologies, government policies, and overarching philosophical and cultural norms. Understanding macro-level resistance is essential for the implementation of CSE.

Political Leaders

Several topics within the CSE curriculum have sparked heated debates among political figures in SSA (Mulholland, 2023). In most cases, the resistance is influenced by perceived external influence, and, subsequently, sovereignty concerns, which oftentimes leads to restrictive policies and legislations. For instance, political leaders in Uganda publicly condemned topics that dealt with non-binary sexual orientations. The despondency prompted a government ban on all CSE programs in 2016, both in school and non-school contexts, 'until an Afro-centered framework was formulated' (Ninsiima et al., 2020). This move faced criticism among non-governmental organizations and health activists with some launching lawsuits against the ban (Fallon, 2017). Similar political turmoil occurred in Mali over a CSE blueprint, leading to a complete halt of sexuality education programs in the country in 2018 (Kah, 2021). UNESCO (2021) has also reported reluctance to CSE at a policy level in Cameroon.

Political resistance to CSE in SSA is a result of various factors, intertwining with other systems-level aspects to shape political leaders' decisions. National-level coordination and open communication across different ecological levels are, therefore, necessary when formulating government policies regarding CSE. Uganda provides an example where multidisciplinary stakeholder groups were established to inform policy formulation and curriculum revision after the ban in 2016 (Ninsiima et al., 2020). The initiative at least resulted in restoration of some form of sexuality education.

While this initiative led to the partial restoration of sexuality education, it emphasizes the adage that obtaining half a loaf is preferable to nothing at all. Multidisciplinary stakeholder groups were also formulated in Senegal to inform the formulation of policies around sexuality education curriculum (Chau et al., 2016). Such collaborative approaches are effective in mitigating resistance at multiple ecological levels.

Custodians of Cultural Practices and Traditions

The macrosystem also encompasses custodians of broader cultural traditions who can form a formidable force of resistance to CSE. Their resistance is rooted in the misalignment of CSE with African socio-philosophical worldviews. As described by Manguvo and Mafuvadze (2015), the African worldview, characterized by a holistic and anthropocentric ontology, views humans as inseparable from the cosmos, with the supernatural exerting control over the living. This perspective shapes how individuals perceive, define, and attribute meaning to the biological and psychosocial processes of sexuality. Embedded in a worldview that dichotomizes the natural and the supernatural, mythologies and taboos become integral to the understanding of sexuality. This provides a distinct psychological frame of reference from that informing CSE, resulting in a dissonance of knowledge and values (Manguvo & Nyanungo, 2018).

In most ethnicities in SSA, the vernacular translation of the term 'sexuality' itself can be considered a taboo. Consequently, many countries have renamed CSE using more culturally acceptable terminologies. For instance, the curriculum is known as "*The World Starts with Me*" in Ghana, Malawi, Burundi, Zambia, and Kenya, while Senegal and Nigeria refer to it as "*Family Life and HIV Education*" (Wekesah et al., 2019). Various taboos surrounding sexuality exist, such as the belief among the Shona people in Zimbabwe that masturbation leads to hair growth on the masturbating hand. Challenging these beliefs is often discouraged as they are embedded within cultural and religious practices, serving as sources of moral guidance. Despite the outliving of some of the taboos and mysticisms around sexuality, a considerable number persist, thus, posing serious impediments to the implementation of CSE.

The subject matter of sexuality in SSA is often shrouded in concealing silence, with limited open discussion (Matswetu & Bhana, 2023). For example, among the Zulu people of South Africa, discussing human sexuality with young people is avoided at all costs. When discussions do occur, usually conducted by aunts and uncles, the discussions are often veiled in metaphors, gestures, and symbolism due to the taboo on using proper terminology (Francis, D. 2016). This hidden language can lead to misconceptions. A study conducted in Zimbabwe revealed that both teachers and students expressed reluctance to participate in CSE due to perceiving some content as humiliating and embarrassing (Munyai et al., 2023). A lot more research across SSA has shown that teachers, parents, and students exhibit strong tendencies toward preserving concealing silence and avoidance when it comes to sexuality, primarily driven by the taboo surrounding the subject.

Formal and Social Media

Another macro-level component impacting CSE directly and indirectly is the media. Despite empirical-based evidence of effectiveness, CSE has faced distortions and misconceptions, leading to implementation setbacks. Common distortions, often disseminated through the media, include claims that the curriculum promotes early sexual activity and non-binary sexual orientations (Ngabaza, 2022). Social media has also become a prominent platform for resistance to CSE worldwide. Pressure groups on social media platform such as Facebook advocating for banning CSE are rampant in several countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa (Nkoy, Venketsamy, & Sing, 2022). The power of these movements lies in their ability to network, connect people, and shape public discourse.

Mitigating distortions and misconceptions about CSE requires widespread publishing of accurate and evidence-based information in both formal and social media to counter the negativity. This is crucial for building positive public perceptions of the curriculum and instilling confidence and trust. Both formal campaigns and the use of social media can serve as effective platforms for raising awareness. Leveraging social media celebrities to disseminate information and dispel distortions can also promote a positive conceptualization of CSE.

The Chronosystem

Situated at the pinnacle of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model is the chronosystem, which acknowledges the influence of time and the ever-changing nature of the environment. Indeed, as previously discussed, certain

philosophical worldviews, cultural practices, traditions, taboos, mysticisms, and indigenous models of sexuality education have demonstrated resilience. Despite their enduring nature, the impact of historical trajectories such as the advent of Christianity and Islam, colonialism, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the surge of information technology and social media, and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, have continually and relentlessly introduced new social dynamics in SSA. Adaptation to contemporary times by custodians at all levels of ecological systems becomes imperative in light of these changes.

Conclusion

The need for evidence-based and culturally appropriate sexuality education within school curricula in SSA is unequivocal, especially given the region's stark statistics on HIV/AIDS. While CSE has been empirically proven to be effective in multiple domains, a standardized "one size fits all" curriculum falls short in providing African youth with the tailored information they require to make informed choices. The deeply ingrained religious and cultural practices, coupled with the resilience of traditional modes of sex education and taboos, pose formidable resistance across all levels of ecological systems. A collaborative engagement strategy, inclusive of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem ecological levels, as advocated by Bronfenbrenner (1979), emerges as a crucial approach to mitigate resistance to CSE.

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