Does sexuality education effect teacher candidates’ attitudes about sexuality and homosexuality?

İşık Gürşimşek*

EMU Faculty of Education, Department of Elementary Education, Famagusta, Cyprus

Received October 23, 2008; revised December 17, 2008; accepted January 04, 2009

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate teacher candidates attitudes related with sexuality and homosexuality; and the relation between these attitudes and attending the course, gender and cultural background. The sample consist of teacher candidates that have (n= 302 candidate) and have not (n= 176 candidate) attended sexuality education course during 2006-2007 academic year at an education faculty in Izmir- a city at the western region of Turkey. Sexual Attitude Scale (SAS) and Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS) are used to gather the data at pre and post-test conditions. Results demonstrate that sexuality education has a positive affect on participants attitudes related with sexuality but not on homosexuality.

Keywords: Sexuality education, attitudes related with sexuality; homosexuality; teacher candidates’ attitudes; teacher training.

1. Introduction

The provision of sexual knowledge and skills is advantageous for human being’s development and everyone has the right to sexuality education (Goldman&Bradley, 2001). Depending to Sex Information and Education Council of US (SIECUS, 1999), one of the main goals of a comprehensive sexuality education program is to constitute an opportunity to develop and understand one’s values, attitudes, and beliefs about sexuality and to help develop relationships and interpersonal skills. A well developed sexuality education program besides informing the individual about healthy development should also help to develop positive self-image, values related with sexuality and sexual decisions. The main job of the educator of sexuality education is to promote a psychosocial environment that fosters understanding, caring and empathy for others and contributes to positive values, beliefs, and attitudes among students.( Bulut,Nalbant&Çokar, 2002, Kehily,2002).

Teachers come into sexuality education programs with their own previous knowledge, their own family values, their own cultural values, their own experiences, and their own fears. Especially in countries as Turkey, where the teachers’ traditional importance as a role model is exaggerated, teachers find teaching sex education difficult and even embarrassing and seem more than happy to allow other people to fill this role (Johanputra,Clack,Cheeseman,Glazier&Riley,1999;Gürşimşek, 2003a;Akbaş, 2000). In contrary; studies have revealed that students draw on many sources for their sexuality education and teachers are high on their preferred list of sources (Eisenberg,Wagenaar&Neumart,1997;McKay&Holowaty,1997; Harrison & Dempsey,1998,Bulut, Nalbant&Çokar, 2002).

Bulut (1999), refers that one of the main necessity of a holistic sexuality education is the competence of the educators. Health education research has also found a significant difference in student learning when teachers are trained (WHO, 2002) and that
training teachers in the use of sexual health curricula improves their implementation of the program (Ross, Nelson & Kolbe, 1991). As a country in effort to design a sexuality education program that covers the needs of the school children, Turkey needs to benefit from the experience of other countries together with the evaluations of the it’s own sexuality education program.

"Supporting the Health Education of Young People” Project of Ministry of Health and UNDPA, which aimed to prepare candidate teachers in educational faculties for sexuality education, began at 1997 in Turkey. Teacher educators have been trained for the participant education program, unrestricted courses have been placed in the curriculum with the consent of High Education Board (YÖK) and Senates of universities and these courses have begun to be taught by trained staff starting with the 2000-2001 academic year. (Bulut, Nalbant & Çokar, 2002). The program is under evaluation and developing depending on the observations and research results carried on by the universities. Recent studies carried on which focus to the positive effect on taking sexual education course demonstrated that beliefs of candidate teachers related with efficacy on teaching sexuality increased (Girgin, Gürüm & Ülker, 2003), and also there were significant differences at attitudes related with sexual issues and sexual education (Gürüm, 2003b).

Observational and research data demonstrate that attending sexuality education course has a positive effect on candidates knowledge- based information processing and skills. To develop an insight for the effectiveness of sexuality education; evaluating the effect of sexuality education on teacher candidates values and beliefs is also important. The aim of this study is to investigate teacher candidates attitudes related with sexuality and homosexuality before and after they had attended sexuality education course; and to determine the relation between these attitudes and attending the course, gender and the place that life has spent the most.

2. Method

1.1. Participants

The sample of this study consist of teacher candidates that have-intervention group, (n= 302 candidate) and have not attended- control group, (n= 176 candidate) sexuality education course during 2006-2007 academic year at an education faculty in İzmir- a city at the western region of Turkey. Among the total 478 participants; 330 were women (69.1%) (Intervention group n =205 and control group n=125) and 148 were men (30.9%) (Intervention group n =97 and control group n= 51). The age of the participants ranged between 19-23 with mean age=21.59. As a whole, 12 % of the participants had spent most of there life in village, 16% at small town and the other 72% at big city.

1.2. Measures

Sexual Attitude Scale (SAS): This scale is developed by the researcher to determine the attitudes related with sexuality. The scale consist of 5 level Likert type total 25 items related with sexual behaviors, sexual equity and freedom, sexual education, marriage and sexual life, aim of sexual relations. The alpha coefficient for 25 item form is .74. The items with negative-item total correlations and below .30 were eliminated (item no: 3, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23) and the format used in this study was a 19 item form of the scale with item correlations between .33-.82 and alpha coefficient .87.

Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS): Second instrument used in the study is the Homosexuality Attitude Scale developed by Kite and Deaux (1986). HAS is a 5 point Likert type scale with 21 items that assesses people's stereotypes, misconceptions, and anxieties about homosexuals. The measure contains a one-dimensional factor representing a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of homosexuals. The internal consistency of the original scale was .92 and test- retest reliability r=.71. For this study the alpha coefficient of the scale was .93 and item correlations ranged between .42-.77.

1.3. Procedure

The pre- test was administered to the participants during the first week of the semester. The participants that were attending to sexuality education course (intervention group) answered the scales during class hour, and participants of the control group randomly selected among the university students that were not attending to sexuality education course took the scales at another class hour. Do to the ethical approval process for doing research with human subjects all of the candidates were informed by the researcher about the aim of the study and that if they accepted to contribute, their contribution was necessary also at the end of semester. Among the candidates that attended the courses, the subjects of this study were selected randomly due to their acceptance to participate at both sessions. The post-test was given to both groups 14 weeks later, at the last week of the semester.
3. Results

Results demonstrate that there were no significant difference between the attitudes of candidate teachers before attending the sexual education course (pre-test condition); and a significant difference in attitudes related with sexuality was seen between the groups after the course attendance (post-test condition). The scores of teacher candidates not attending the course is higher on SAS (X=49.48) than candidates that attended the course (X=42.67), and the difference between the groups are significant (F (1,476) =4.82, p<.01). The candidates that have not attended to the sexual education course are seen to have more prejudiced and normative attitude to topics related with sexuality.

Table 1. Means and standard deviation scores of the scales for pre-test and post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention 302</td>
<td>32.00</td>
<td>8.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>32.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>36.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAS</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>37.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.01

No significant difference is seen between the scores of two groups on Homosexuality Attitudes Scale between the pre-test and post-test conditions. The scores of the participants attending the course are seen to be higher (X=60.68) than the not attending participants (X=58.32), although the difference between the group scores are not significant.

The relation between the attitudes of the candidates and gender were demonstrated through the scores of the participants that have attended the sexual education course. Results demonstrate that gender is positively related with sexual attitudes and attitudes for homosexuality for both pre-test and post-test conditions. SAS pre-test scores of women (X=30.64) are seen to be lower than men (X=35.11), and the difference between the two groups is significant (F (1,300) =5.34, p<.01). Women are also seen to have lower scores (X=34.28) than men (X=41.40) in HAS. A similar relation is demonstrated for the post-test condition in that again the scores of women are lower than men in both SAS (women X=43.11 men X=46.57) (F(1,300)=2.66, p<.05) and HAS (women X=57.80 men X=65.13) (F(1,300)=4.41, p<.01). Men are seen to have a more normative and prejudiced attitudes related with sexual issues and homosexuality.

The place that the participants have spent most of their life is determined as a mediating variable for determining the cultural background of the candidates. The evaluation of this variable is also evaluated from pre-test and post-test scores of the participants that have attended the course. Results demonstrate that there is a significant differences between the attitudes of participants due to the place they have spent most of their life at pre-test scores of SAS (F=5.26(2,299 ), p<.05 ) and HAS (F=6.16( 2,299 ), p<.05 ). The participants that have spent most of their life in village (X=37.25) are seen to have a more normative and prejudiced attitudes related with sexuality then the ones from small town (X=32.86) and cities (X=31.55). The same relation is seen in the pre-test scores of HAS (Village X=41.61, Small town X=37.47, City X=35.95). Although similar tendency is seen at the scores of the groups for SAS (Village X=47.33, Small town X=45.64, City X=43.77) and HAS (Village X=64.38, Small town X= 62.49, City X=59.49) the difference is not significant for the post-test condition.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate a positive effect of attending to sexuality education course on the attitudes of candidate teachers. In relation to the overall aims of the sexuality education course as to increase knowledge on sexual health issues, participants are also seen to change their views towards less conservative norms and attitudes related to sexuality.

Gender is seen to affect the participants attitudes related with sexuality. The findings of related studies demonstrate that men have more conservative and normative attitudes in relation with sexuality and higher tendency of prejudice for homosexuals (Burn, 2000; Kite and Deaux, 1986; Murray, 2001). The results of this study support these findings and seem important when evaluated together with the notion that in sexuality education, as in other areas, boys clearly benefit from male role models (Halstead & Waite, 2001; Murray, 2001). Designing a sexual education program that takes into consideration of the different socialization process depending on gender, and helping teacher candidates to understand their effect on students’ values related to sexual orientation and discrimination should be one of the main goals of the education. Providing information about the diversity of sexual identities in the community is the first step towards promoting tolerance towards people of differing sexual identities (Burn, 2000). Teacher’s beliefs and values becomes as the turning point in developing this understanding. The result of
this study in relation with the gender of the teacher candidates deserves interest in this sense. Sexuality education with notions as, the need to respect others and treat them fairly regardless of sexual orientation, unacceptability of all forms of bullying should be shared by all teachers in classes of sexual education (Kehily,2002;WHO,2002).To accomplish this goal, in-service education of teachers should be designed in a much more value orientation for candidate teachers to notify there own belief systems and attitudes and the effect it might have on their students.

The finding of this study in relation with the difference between the attitudes of participants related with the longest place they had spent their life was diminished for both scales at post-test conditions. Although at the beginning of the course, it was hard for the participants with a more traditional background to accept different lifestyles and worldviews, examining and discussing these topics during the course, and observing different models is seen to help some participants to express their views and attitudes with more freedom. In this sense, the notion of “importance of accepting a diversity of lifestyles within society as long as such lifestyles do not involve harm to others” (DfEE,2000) should be at the core of the value base of sexuality education. A more positive approach emphasizing the capacities or virtues (both behavioral and emotional) such as empathy, the ability to take the other's perspective, concern for the other and self-reflection must be taught (Dalloway, 2000;Çok, 2003). Sexual education should help teacher candidates to reflect critically on the sexual values, attitudes and understanding that they have already accomplished in their everyday life, so that they can mature in knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes related with sexuality.

References

Gürüşme, I.(2003a) Rehber öğretmenlerin cinsel eğitimin gerekliğine ve işlevsellüğine ilişkin görüşleri . Sağlık Eğitim, Sayı 5-6, s.32-44.