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## A Scoping Review of Learners' Perceptions on What Influences Teachers' Approaches to Teaching Comprehensive Sexuality Education in South African Schools

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### Abstract

Recent arguments regarding the South African comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) curriculum indicate that the existing programme neglects to incorporate factors that influence the behaviour of school learners in South Africa such as learners' and teachers' perceptions of cultural, social, and gender norms. Based on a literature search, it is evident that there is a paucity of research that reflects the voices of learners regarding their experience of how the CSE subject is taught as compared to what they want to learn. Therefore, this article aimed to conduct a scoping review to map learners' perceptions of what influences their teachers' approach to teaching CSE subject matter in South Africa. The Cochrane, EBSCOhost, Scopus, ProQuest, JSTOR, and Google Scholar databases were searched for studies (a) published from January 2010 till May 2021, (b) with an explicit focus on learner feedback on their perceptions of influences to teachers teaching CSE, (c) that were qualitative studies, and (d) were published in English in peer-reviewed journals. Four studies were identified that reported on data collected from learners aged 14–18 years using in-depth interviews ( $N = 1$ ), focus group discussions ( $N = 2$ ), and an ethnographic study ( $N = 1$ ). A qualitative analysis of the findings identified three major themes: (1) an inherent bias towards heterosexuality as normal and natural, (2) the belief that learners need to be taught to uphold culturally dictated normative gender roles, and (3) an avoidance of subject matter relating to the LGBTQI+ community, influenced by beliefs that limited interactions would lead to limited gender and sexual fluidity. Findings conclude that transformative communication needs to take place to update the curriculum to create a space for all learners to learn about healthy life choices.

**Keywords:** curriculum, curriculum changes, scoping review, sexuality education curriculum, learner feedback, South Africa

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## Introduction

South Africa is considered a high-risk country for the HIV and AIDS epidemic given that it was reported that in 2018, approximately 7.7 million people were living with HIV, which severely affected 38,000 secondary school learners between the ages of 14 and 18 in that year (Be in the Know, 2020). To combat the HIV epidemic, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) was introduced as part of the life orientation (LO) subject by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in 2000 to reduce chances of learners receiving misleading messages on topics relating to safe sex, understanding sexuality and gender, and healthy relationships (DBE, 2019a). Consequently, sexuality education in South Africa has become synonymous with HIV prevention and the need to provide accurate information around topics of values, sexuality, sexual behaviour, and leading safe and healthy lives (DBE, 2019b). However, despite the introduction of CSE in the LO class in 2000, according to a study by De Wet et al. in 2019, only 11% of young participants responded with a 100% accurate knowledge of HIV, and only 25% of the young participants responded with 75% accuracy. Investigations through questioning teachers at secondary schools in South Africa regarding barriers to providing comprehensive sexual education confirmed that one of the barriers is a lack in teacher training (Francis, 2011, 2012). A second barrier, according to teachers, is linked to resistance in teaching CSE at schools because of the teachers' perceptions of the subject matter as sensitive in nature (Francis, 2019; Francis & DePalma, 2015). In addition to the barriers of teacher training and resistance, the literature indicates that the focus of the CSE programme in South Africa is on teaching sex and sexuality to reduce chances of HIV and AIDS, with little focus on topics relating to sexual and gender fluidity (DBE, 2019a, 2019b; Francis, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2019; Francis & DePalma, 2015).

The reason for their diminished focus on fluid sexuality and genders, according to a study by Francis (2011), was that many teachers believed the new curriculum deviated from their religious or cultural views of heterosexual identity and that teaching it threatened their individual and collective cultural identities. Thus far, various pieces of literature have reported only on the teachers' perspectives on the teaching of the CSE curriculum (Francis, 2010, 2011, 2012; Francis & DePalma, 2015), and these have identified that many teachers teach CSE using a hidden curriculum to teach their perspectives of desired culturally normative values and use the method of null curriculum to avoid in-depth teaching relating to the LGBTQI+ community. Based on a literature search, it is evident that there is a paucity of research that reflects the voices of learners regarding their perceptions of how the CSE subject is taught as compared to what they want to learn. Therefore, this article aimed to conduct a scoping review to map learner perceptions of what influences their teachers' approach to teaching CSE subject matter in terms of social, cultural, and gender norms in South Africa. The findings are likely to shed light on whether learners perceive that they are adequately educated on healthy life choices in terms of sexuality and sex based on their sexual and gender fluidity, or if teachers' biases are limiting their opportunity to make informed and safe decisions in life.

## Teaching Comprehensive Sexuality Education in South Africa

The CSE subject matter in the LO curriculum is intended to equip learners with factual information to assist them in making informed choices about their health and sexuality, and to create a basic understanding of power relations, sexuality, and gender (Ngabaza et al., 2016). As a formal definition, CSE incorporates a "rights-based and gender-focused approach to sexuality education" (Venketsamy & Kinear, 2020, p. 2) hence, embracing a holistic approach to sexuality and personal development. In

South Africa, the CSE subject matter is integrated into the LO curriculum under “personal well-being,” which forms part of less than a third of the LO curriculum (Adams Tucker et al., 2016; Francis, 2019; Ngabaza et al., 2016). The DBE introduced the personal well-being subject from Grade 4 in schools to reduce the spread of inaccurate information learners receive from the media and peers on topics focusing on sexuality and sexual health (Francis, 2010). The LO subject is allocated a total of 70 hours of teaching and contact for all learners, of which 10 to 20 hours are allocated for the CSE subject matter (DBE, 2011). The CSE, which is introduced in Grades 4 and 5, only covers topics relating to respect, including respect for one’s body and the bodies of others, lessons on morals and cultural norms, and facts on HIV and AIDS over a period of 10 to 12 hours in the year. From Grade 6 onwards, the CSE subject matter also introduces safe sex, sexuality, and gender, which are given almost 12 to 20 hours of contact time (DBE, 2011). Teachers, who specialise in other different subjects, are provided basic guideline scripts to follow for teaching the subject matter, and most have reported receiving no training beyond the scripts provided (Francis, 2012). Therefore, no teachers are employed primarily to teach LO because it is seen as a minor subject that can be taught by any teacher (Francis, 2012).

In addition to the strict focus on HIV infection reduction and the little to no teacher training, we find ample arguments from studies conducted on teachers’ feedback regarding the curriculum’s teaching experiences, which are biased by their beliefs and culture. In a study focusing on teachers’ perspectives, Francis (2012) noted that teachers found that the subject content of the LO course, although necessary for comprehensive education on sexuality, was excessive. Various misconceptions and beliefs biased teachers’ concerns on the appropriateness of sexuality education. For example, many teachers felt that sexuality education was only necessary for township schools, or that sexuality education was the responsibility of parents (Francis, 2010). According to Venketsamy and Kinear (2020), teachers felt that the core purpose of the CSE was to teach learners morals and values on sexuality and personal development. Therefore, many teachers believed that the new curriculum deviated from their religious or cultural identity, and beliefs of normative identities, and that teaching it felt as if it threatened their individual and collective cultural identities. Feedback from teachers in South Africa confirmed that they teach the CSE subject matter using hidden and null curricula, concepts introduced by Eisner (1994).

The hidden curriculum is constructed as lessons taught by teachers, which emerge from the culture surrounding the local school district, the culture surrounding schools, and the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours that have been defined by the local district. In this case, the hidden curriculum taught by South African teachers is embedded in cultural and religious discourses that perpetuate the heteronormative culture. Comparatively, Eisner (1985) defined the null curriculum as “the options students are not afforded, the perspectives they may never know about, much less be able to use, the concepts and skills that are not part of their intellectual repertoire” (pp. 106–107). According to findings from Francis (2019), this translates into the teachers avoiding all subjects relating to sexual and gender fluidity and the practice of safe healthy choices when exploring their sexuality and gender identity beyond what is considered normal. Therefore studies focusing on teacher feedback can conclude that, despite teaching a CSE curriculum that is considered factual and accurate, the teachers’ teaching styles neglect the intricacy of local cultural, social, and gender norms that have an influence on the behaviours of learners and their teachers in South Africa (de la Sablonnière, 2017; Wood & Roller, 2014). The insights from this feedback also indicate that teaching the new fluid sexuality education curriculum may lead to intrinsic threats to the teacher’s social and cultural identities, influencing their teaching attitudes and styles. This social threat to identity is further strengthened by the discourses of the African continent that construct fluid sexual and gender identities as unnatural or as other (Francis, 2011).

From here on, the article makes reference to the “other” as non-normative. Thus, the teachers’ individual and cultural identities, which tie to their belief systems, influence their pedagogic and moral approach to teaching CSE content (Francis, 2011). Consequently, Francis (2010) argued that if teachers are empowered and feel comfortable in their beliefs and social identity to teach the fluid sexuality content, they will be able to teach the content without avoidance or bias of the subject. Through the use of the scoping review, we are provided with the opportunity to listen to the learner’s perspectives—and to possibly find avenues to transform the teacher–learner experience of the CSE subject matter.

## **Theoretical Standpoint**

The data analysis is focused on identity threat theory (ITT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which argues that particular situational cues—often communicated by well-meaning teachers—send a signal to the minority or stigmatised groups (i.e., those who are not heteronormative or gender normative) on whether their identity is devalued or respected. In ITT, a threat to an identity occurs due to social change (de la Sablonnière, 2017). According to Steele (1997) and Steele and Aronson (1995), people can experience stereotype threat, which is a fear of being judged on the basis of a situation or confirmation that they fall into those negative stereotypes. This stereotype threat is a result of the perception of negative self-relevant group stereotypes. Therefore an individual whose identity is threatened by social change stabilises the structure of their identity through steps of restoration and modification. To achieve stability of their identity, the individuals integrate the new elements of social change into their identity and assign a positive or negative bias to it (Steele et al., 2002). According to ITT, when the moral behaviour of people within a certain group is called into question, members of that group can experience different varieties of identity threat (Steele et al., 2002).

Previous studies have reflected on the concerns of teachers regarding effectively teaching CSE based on belief systems and moral limitations. This study reflects on its findings of learners’ experiences of being taught the CSE and whether they threaten aspects of their group identities. The theory of identity threat theory is used because open conversations for transformation in the classroom can only begin by exploring the concerns and threats to identity that both learners and teachers face when interacting with the CSE subject matter.

## **Purpose of This Review**

A scoping review is ideal for characterising the evidence from a new body of literature on a given topic to suggest directions for study (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010). Essentially, a scoping review is conducted to explore trends and patterns of information on an emerging body of literature where a few studies have been published to identify the direction of the findings, but not enough publications to justify a systematic review. A scoping review is considered an appropriate research method for identifying and summarising the emerging evidence (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005) of learners’ concerns or biases on the teachers’ beliefs that influence how they are taught the CSE subject matter. Our aim was to use the scoping review methodology (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005) to identify trends from qualitative studies that focus on learners’ feedback on their perceptions of what influences the teachers’ approach to teaching the CSE subject matter in South Africa. The findings from this scoping review would be used to inform various stakeholders on the information and education that learners are hoping to be introduced to in a safe space, as opposed to the apparent hidden curriculum they are taught by teachers.

Such findings can be used to open discussions on new steps for transforming how teachers interact with the subject matter in the classrooms. In addition, findings of this exploratory scoping review

would be important in guiding future workshops and training of teachers to assist them in successfully carrying out the CSE goals with a reduced sense of identity threat. This scoping review can be considered important to bring about social change because the findings will bring to light the discussions and values learners feel they need to be educated on in their classes without bias, stigma, or avoidance. Given that the goal of the CSE subject matter is to reduce infection of HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and to make healthy life choices, then it can be argued that the DBE will only achieve its goals by addressing all relevant topics learners request to be educated on in a safe environment. And such transformation of the school teaching approach can only take place after this scoping review has informed readers of the trends in learner feedback regarding how they are taught the CSE subject matter.

## **Methodology**

A comprehensive literature search was conducted by the author and a research consultancy to identify studies reporting on qualitative feedback of learners on the teaching approach of their teachers for the CSE subject matter in secondary schools in South Africa. To justify the scoping review, we first searched for systematic reviews on the Cochrane database that focused on the qualitative feedback of secondary school learners on their perceptions of what influenced the teachers' approach to teaching the CSE in South Africa. No systematic reviews were found for the specific study focus, which justified this scoping review given that a null result indicates that the study scope forms part of an emerging body of literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). We then searched five international databases (EBSCOhost, Scopus, ProQuest, JSTOR, and Google Scholar) for peer-reviewed qualitative studies published from January 2010 till May 2021 to cover a full 10-year period. We further browsed the reference lists of every article with a title that met the inclusion criteria to identify primary authors in the field who may have published other articles that could be relevant or considered for the scoping review. Each database was searched using the following Boolean search terms: comprehensive sexuality education OR sexuality education OR life orientation AND curriculum AND student feedback OR student reviews OR student experiences AND South Africa. We saved all search result articles to Zotero (referencing software), then thoroughly reviewed articles for inclusion in our review.

## **Eligibility Criteria**

The review included qualitative methodological studies that (a) were published in English, (b) had an explicit focus on learner feedback (aged 14–18 years) on their perceptions of what influences teachers when they teach the sexual education curriculum in their secondary school, (c) reported on qualitative studies and not on quantitative studies or the testing of interventions, and (d) were published from January 2010 till May 2021. See Table 1 for the study inclusion and exclusion criteria.

**Table 1**  
*Study Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Inclusion criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion criteria</b>
Study design	Exploratory studies using qualitative methodologies.	Literature reviews, editorial notes, letters, commentaries, debates, and empirical studies.
Publication dates	January 2010 till May 2021.	Published prior to January 2010 or after May 2021.
Participants	Learners aged 14 to 18 years.	Parents or teachers responding on their views of the learner experiences.
Focus	To map the qualitative feedback from learners in secondary schools on their perceptions of what influences their teachers' approach to teaching the comprehensive sexuality education curriculum in South Africa.	To review literature or report on a desktop review assuming learner perceptions of their teacher's approach to teaching the comprehensive sexuality education curriculum. The study is also excluded if the focus is met but outside the boundaries of South Africa.

### **Search Tree Procedure and Outcomes**

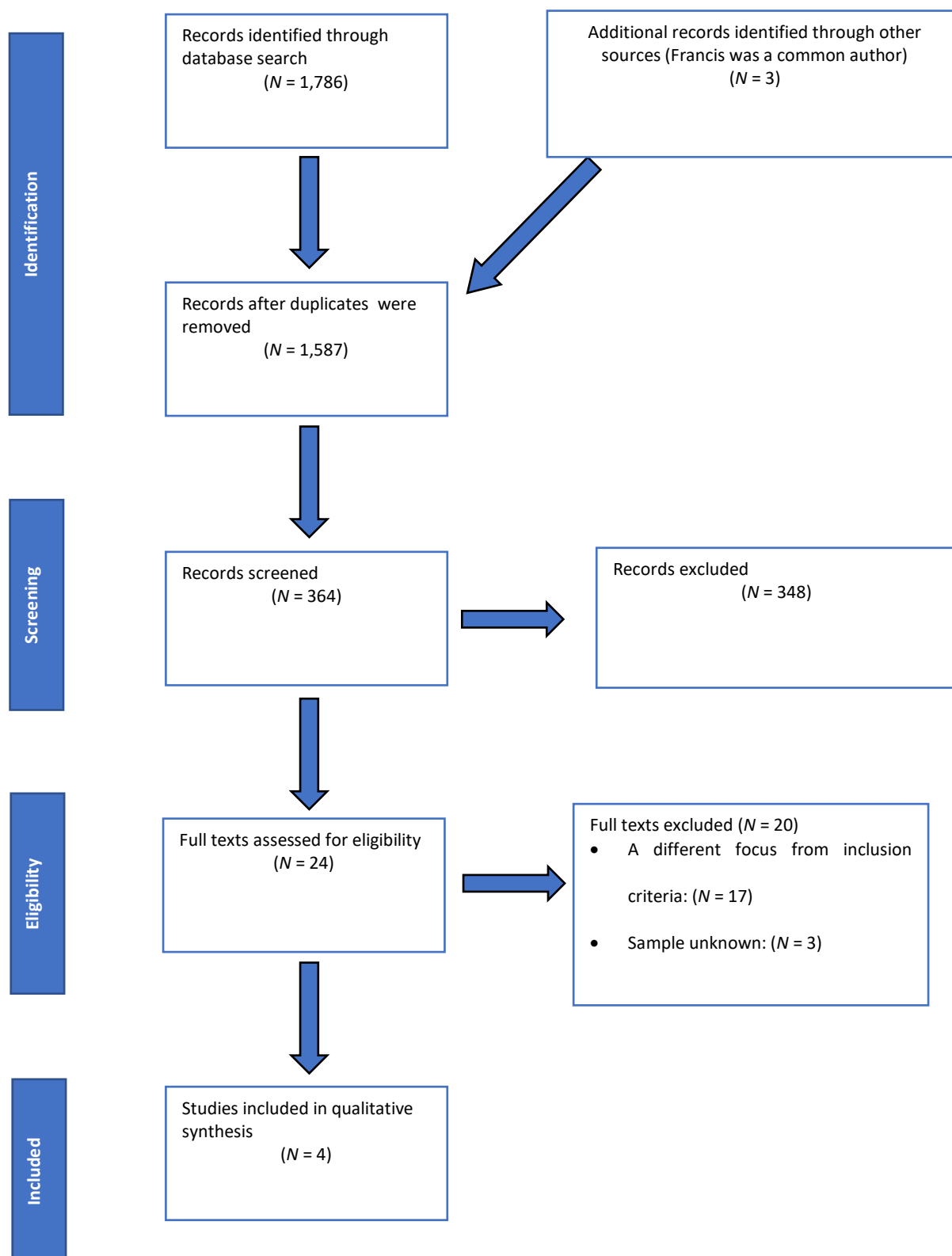
A total of 364 articles were retrieved for screening (see Figure 1) from the initial result of 1,786 search results. Further screening of titles and abstracts resulted in the exclusion of 348 at this stage. The selection process based on title and abstracts resulted in a preliminary list of 24 articles, which were further scrutinised against the inclusion criteria. Thereafter, 17 articles were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria. We then analysed the full text of the remaining seven articles to confirm they met the predetermined eligibility criteria. Three articles were excluded after the full-text analysis because they did not meet the study focus or had missing information on the sample, finalising four articles for the review. To add rigour to the search process, the reference lists of each of the four articles were searched for any repeating authors or additional articles of relevance. Our manual search resulted in no additional study, finalising our four articles for this review. Final study inclusion was by consensus between the author and research consultancy.

### **Data Analysis, Extraction, and Management**

We adopted the six steps recommended by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and advanced by Levac et al. (2010) as the data extraction tool to capture the data and organise the research results relevant to the study's aim. This tool organised the results in the following categories: authors and publication date, location, study design and sample, research focus, results of participant perceptions (see Table 2). We analysed data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps for systematic thematic analysis (TA). We started with familiarising ourselves with the data, then generated initial codes; thereafter, we searched and reviewed the themes before defining and naming them; lastly, we reported the results (in the section below). We used TA because it allowed us to search across the final articles' results to find repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which are reported as the underlying themes in the variations of our focus area. To analyse the data, we first explored the learner feedback on their perceptions of how the CSE subject matter is taught in their schools and how it is based on their teachers' beliefs. We then mapped the proposed recommendations to transform the teaching of the subject matter to make it more comprehensive and inclusive of all learners—regardless of their sexuality or gender identification.

Figure 1

## Scoping Review Search Procedure Flowchart



**Table 2****Selected Article Extracts**

<b>Authors &amp; publication date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Research design &amp; sample</b>	<b>Research focus</b>	<b>Results of participant perceptions</b>
(Adams Tucker et al., 2016)	South Africa	Ethnographic study of 25 sexually active learners from 16 schools.	This study explored how learners engaged with sexuality and HIV- and AIDS-related education taught in LO in South Africa, and what they understand of the dynamics that support or hinder engagement.	Learners perceived a reduced effort from teachers to comprehensively educate them on CSE. This perception tarnished the status of LO as a subject and the learners' motivation to participate. Learner engagement was reported to be influenced by their internalised discourse on HIV and AIDS, gender and sexuality, the quality of relationship between learners and teachers, teaching competencies, peer pressures, and broader cultural dynamics.
(Francis, 2019)	South Africa	In-depth interviews with 33 participants.	This article focused on how the CSE subject discursively constructed fluid sexualities, and with what effects.	Results found that although many teachers positively argued for the inclusion of fluid sexualities, however, in their teaching styles they privileged heterosexuality as legitimate and natural and LGBTQI+ as deviant. Secondly, results confirmed that teachers' discourses constructed LGBTQI+ youth as innocent, childlike, and hypersexual and rebellious, and taught that LGBTQI+ youth require discipline and intervention.
(Kruger et al., 2015)	South Africa	Focus group discussions with 12 Coloured girls aged 16–18 years.	The article focused on a group of Coloured female South African learners' perceptions of their sexual agency and explored how it is shaped (explicitly and implicitly)	Results found that the Coloured South African female learners constructed their agency as both enabled and constrained simultaneously. For example, on the one hand, they perceived that their teachers explicitly communicated that they have agency and should take responsibility for themselves sexually, whereas the teachers' implicitly conveyed that what the female learners really thought and felt about sex and sexuality



(Ngabaza et al., 2016)	South Africa	Focus group discussions.	<p>by the LO CSE subject material.</p> <p>The article focused on exploring the ways in which the teaching of CSE engaged with larger goals of gender justice.</p>	<p>was not important. In addition, teachers were perceived to further complicate young women's constructions of their sexual agency because they actively taught heteronormative gender roles in which men are assumed to take the lead in sexual matters.</p> <p>Learners perceived that teachers teach CSE in a manner that upholds normative gender roles and emphasises male-dominant power rather than challenging it. Teachers are perceived as messengers of cautionary messages that place more responsibility for reproductive health on female learners, and used didactic, authoritative pedagogical techniques that did not acknowledge the learners' experiences or facilitate their sexual agency.</p>
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## Results

From our scoping review and critique, we identified four studies published in South Africa that met the inclusion criteria (Adams Tucker et al., 2016; Francis, 2019; Kruger et al., 2015; Ngabaza et al., 2016). Data for the studies were collected from secondary school learners aged 14–18 years using in-depth interviews ( $N = 1$ ), focus group discussions ( $N = 2$ ), and an ethnographic study ( $N = 1$ ). Findings from the articles were analysed qualitatively to draw on major themes and findings, discussed in detail below. The following themes below speak to the perceptions of learners on what influences teachers' approach to teaching the CSE subject matter. The three major themes speak to (1) an inherent bias towards heterosexuality as normal and natural, (2) the belief that learners need to be taught to uphold the normative gender roles because that is what culture dictates, and (3) avoidance of subject matter relating to the LGBTQI+ community due to their beliefs that limited interactions would lead to limited gender and sexual fluidity.

### Educator Bias Towards Heterosexuality as Natural

The first theme spoke to teachers' personal beliefs, which biased their teaching approaches. Learners perceived that the teachers' personal and religious values strongly influenced their approach to educating learners on subject materials relating the sexual and gender fluidity. Consequently, teachers' personal values and positions, which are perceived to be closely intertwined with their approach to teaching, influence whether they teach or avoid (i.e., hide) content of the curriculum that they consider to be threatening their belief system (Adams Tucker et al., 2016). The findings of this review revealed that according to learners' perceptions, teachers teach heterosexuality as the normal and natural identity that learners should follow; counter normative sexualities are taught to learners to be perceived as the result of hypersexuality or ignorance of the normative roles of gender (Adams Tucker et al., 2016; Francis, 2019). These constructions are mainly imposed on LGBTQI+ community members through teaching discourses of blame, judgment, some tolerance, and pity. According to learner feedback, teachers teach about gender and sexuality fluidity by representing LGBTQI+ youth as children who need adult protection and supervision to make the "correct" choices in life (Adams Tucker et al., 2016; Francis, 2019).

This positioning of LGBTQI+ youth as innocent and ignorant suggests that teachers believe they are without adequate sexual knowledge and agency. Learners perceived their teachers' communication as a hidden curriculum that favours heterosexuality as natural and legitimate sexual behaviour, and LGBTQI+ youth as deviants whose actions are contrary to normal sexual behaviour (Adams Tucker et al., 2016; Francis, 2019). Feedback from learners indicated they believed this bias of teachers in how they taught the subject was mainly due to the teachers' lack of knowledge or understanding of the values and worldviews of the LGBTQI+ community. Consequently, learners felt that it is due to various religious and cultural opinions that teachers are usually reluctant to deal with the topic of gender and sexual fluidity in the classroom (Adams Tucker et al., 2016). In addition, the teachers' dominant beliefs of heteronormative culture as the correct pedagogy was perceived as the driving factor positioning LGBTQI+ youth as immoral and deviant, comparing their identities as other from heterosexuals. Therefore, learners felt that during an age where they are exploring and building their own identities, teachers accommodate heterosexual learners with support and privilege in the classroom. Learners reported that the teachers' mindset of normal and other makes the LGBTQI+ youth feel invisible and ignored in what is supposed to be a safe space for education on health and sexuality (Adams Tucker et al., 2016). The impact of this invisibility, as reported by the LGBTQI+ youth, results in them feeling further marginalised, isolated, and prejudiced by classmates and teachers (Francis, 2019).

### **Upholding Normative Gender Roles**

The second theme, predominantly present in the study by Kruger et al. (2015), reflects the learners' perceptions of their educational environment upholding normative gender roles; they reported feeling they are to assume and expect men to take the lead in sexual matters, which females should learn how to navigate. Findings from learner feedback revealed that young women have started to challenge male dominance in sexual and social contexts in their LO classrooms (Kruger et al., 2015). According to the learners' in from Kruger et al. (2015), the CSE subject matter is not well adjusted to the current social climate where it is acceptable to challenge toxic heterosexual practices and gender roles; nor does the manner in which teachers teach the CSE subject support the positive sexual agency of young women. Learners perceived that the cultural upbringing of teachers in a patriarchal society was influencing their teaching the repetitive message of heteronormative gender roles in which the emphasis is on men taking the lead in sexual matters and ignoring the notion of women having any agency in relationships and their sexual choices (Kruger et al., 2015). Learners also perceived a lack of gender consciousness through teachers' responses to questions in gender stereotypic manners—for instance, valuing the young men's contributions more in class, and actively reinforcing unequal and normative gender practices (Kruger et al., 2015).

Learners reported that teachers do not teach a curriculum that focuses on countering masculine dominant gender roles, and suggested that the CSE needs to transform into a subject that also focuses on the struggles faced by young women and provides supportive and constructive spaces for them to speak about sex and sexuality. Secondly, learners felt that young women should be allowed to talk about their thoughts and feelings and that the CSE should teach healthy communication of feelings, consent, and sexuality for both males and females. Furthermore, learners suggested that LO teachers need to acknowledge that women's sexuality construction should not only be shaped by the CSE material, but can also be influenced by various communities, family values, and authority figures as role models, teachers, and peers. Thus, learners' feedback indicates that teachers need to be taught that despite their working environment pushing for heteronormativity, they should be accepting of the change so that the agency of female students to express opinions contradictory to cultural norms is enabled, and males are taught approaches to avoid toxic masculinity that can harm those around them (Kruger et al., 2015; Wood & Roller, 2014).

### **Limitations for Interactive Learning and Sexual and Gender Fluidity Invisibility**

The third theme spoke to learners' perceptions of the limitations in the curriculum for interactive learning; they reported that teachers make an active effort to limit learner interaction with topics relating to sexual and gender fluidity (Francis, 2019; Ngabaza et al., 2016). As per learner feedback, teachers inform learners requesting a safe space for LGBTQI+ discussions that currently no educational policies exist that require schools to create a safe space where matters of the well-being of the LGBTQI+ community are addressed in the curriculum or by their teachers (Francis, 2019). Consequently, learners felt that the lack of policy and the LGBTQI+ invisibility exacerbated by teacher bias and curriculum avoidance contradicts the goals of equal and inclusive education (Francis, 2019). Learners felt that the reason teachers ignore the subject matter of sexual and gender fluidity is that these issues are not clearly outlined in the LO curriculum policy, and teachers are provided with little guidance on these issues. LO teachers lack training for case management and counselling.

The findings revealed that most of the learners favoured discussion open to educating on health and sexual risks and protective measures important for the LGBTQI+ community; however, learners felt that their teachers were unwilling to encourage discussions linked to gender and sexual fluidity. This was because most of the teachers came from diverse fields and lacked the skills to effectively and confidently deliver sexuality education. As a result, learners reported that little attention is paid by teachers to sexual and gender diversity education and health risks linked to various sexual health

choices. Additionally, learners indicated that good interpersonal relationships usually encourage young individuals to communicate with LO teachers about their issues, improving their participation in the classroom (Ngabaza et al., 2016). However, due to the avoidance of LGBTQI+ related matters, barriers have developed in learners regarding participation in class, resulting in them turning towards self-reliance in problem-solving personal concerns regarding gender identity and sexuality. Such barriers that limit class participation include fear of facing prejudice from their peers for expressing their personal views on gendered norms or gender identity, sex-related issues, and cultural norms. Other barriers to participation are related to the LO teachers' judgment, confidentiality and trustworthiness, and discomfort associated with painful realities such as experiencing sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy, and testing positive for HIV and AIDS (Francis, 2019).

## Discussion

From the findings, three overarching themes of learner perceptions of the influences of how teachers teach CSE in South Africa can be observed, and which confirm that teachers are teaching a hidden curriculum. The three major themes speak to (1) an inherent bias of teachers towards heterosexuality as normal and natural as the correct curriculum to be taught, (2) the belief that learners need to be taught to uphold the normative gender roles because that is what culture dictates, and (3) avoidance of subject matter relating to the LGBTQI+ community due to teachers' beliefs that limited interactions will lead to limited gender and sexual fluidity. In line with the findings by Francis (2011), the teachers' belief system of heteronormative and gender-normative as "natural" have influenced their pedagogical and didactic approach to teaching CSE content. Consequently, the learners face various areas of identity threat as individuals and as a group. Firstly, they are being encouraged to follow the natural heteronormative gender and sexuality roles. From Themes 1 and 2, we note that the female learners experience gender normative roles as a threat to their identity as strong, independent women responsible for their positive sexual agency. Thus, learners who may believe in independence, agency, and challenging toxic masculinity or male dominance feel as if they are being persuaded to lose their sense of agency and become complicit in the normative patriarchal society's roles. This persuasion by teachers of what is considered gender normative is also perceived through teachers teaching that young women are less enabled by society to use their power and independence than their male partners and friends. Additionally, this bias adds pressure to the male learners to reflect a particular image of masculinity, which may even be contrary to their beliefs. However, despite the pressures placed on young heteronormative learners to follow cultural norms, results indicate that the identity of LGBTQI+ learners is entirely disregarded when teaching with a bias towards gender normative roles, creating the perception that any learners identifying as LGBTQI+ are not welcome to express their views and feelings.

Secondly, biasing towards heteronormativity as normal and gender or sexual fluidity as other creates a class binary divide based on gender and sexual identity (Adams Tucker et al., 2016; Francis, 2019). With educators assuming that majority of the class are heteronormative, they create a divide in which the lifestyle and choices of the minority group are threatened. We also saw that some teachers take extra care to avoid answering any questions related to sexual and gender fluidity due to a lack of certainty on the curriculum's outline (Francis 2011, 2019). However, the reluctance to answer, or the assumed lack of knowledge displayed to learners, may reflect as the teachers rejecting the identity of the minority group and marking it as irrelevant for education purposes, as theorised by (Steele et al., 2002).

Lastly, the CSE subject was designed to equip learners with factual information to assist in making informed choices about their sexuality and health and create a basic understanding of interpersonal power relations and gender (Ngabaza et al., 2016). However, our learners are not provided with the opportunities for interactive learning of comprehensive sexuality (Ngabaza et al., 2016) or sexual

diversity. Such avoidance of questions and interactive discussions, steered by teachers, may create an implicit feeling in learners that sexual diversity is unAfrican (Francis, 2010) or a subject to be steered clear of. The avoidance of such subjects is not only against children's rights to be educated in sexuality but also threatens the freedom of learners who may want to explore their sexual identity in a safe space.

Findings of this review revealed that learner experiences of the subject are based on their teachers' perceptions of diverse gender expressions and sexual orientation, framed by social misconceptions, cultural beliefs, and religion. These findings have highlighted that silencing LGBTQI+ expression is the most common approach teachers use in schools (Adams Tucker et al., 2016; Francis, 2019). Despite the various research publications on gender diversity, little transformation has been seen in teachers' perceptions of sexual diversity in South Africa, which affects their learners' experiences of the subject. In terms of identity threat theory, the silencing of LGBTQI+ expressions threatens the learners' developing identities to explore their true selves. For example, teachers who deliberately ignore the topic or extend the focus on the heteronormative identity as normal threaten the identity of learners who identify as LGBTQI+ given that teachers' actions and lack of comfort with the topic are indirectly labelling non-heteronormative identities as taboo. Additionally, if teachers express to learners that the lack of explicit instructions in the LO curriculum is the main cause of why they avoid discussions on sexual diversity in the class, then their unwillingness indirectly threatens non-heteronormative identities as less equal or as unimportant for the effort to try. Therefore, we can see that the current teaching style of the CSE subjects is preventing the creation of a safe space where learners can safely be guided while exploring their non-heteronormative identities—the availability of a space that enables a sense of security to explore one's identity is paramount according to ITT. The consequences of such teachings may lead to learners hiding their true identity from everyone for fear of prejudice, which would have been started in the classroom by their teachers.

Consequently, analysis of this scoping review's findings necessitate the need for South African LO teachers to reflect on their ideologies and prejudices towards fluid sexual and gender identities and reflect on its consequences on the effect of learners' sense of self and sense of safety in their identity as postulated by ITT. Literature has demonstrated that teachers who understand the legal, medical, and social issues related to the LGBTQI+ community are willing to encourage discussion in the classroom on the subject of learners exploring their gender and sexuality (Francis, 2019). Therefore, to effectively deal with comprehensive sexuality education that is inclusive of all sexual and gender identities, teachers need to examine their prejudices, beliefs, and ideas. To this end, time must be spent updating and reflecting on their understanding of good practice of CSE through workshops and training. Individuals at policy level are encouraged to introduce a clearer CSE curriculum framework that assigns clearer guidelines for teachers to increase their confidence in teaching the subject without breaching the trust of parents. Lastly, the review also demonstrated learners' concerns regarding LO teacher's trustworthiness, judgment, and ability to keep the confidentiality of learners—and the discomfort experienced when lessons delve into painful realities such as sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy, and HIV and AIDS. Considering this, it is important to establish a psychologically safe environment in class for LGBTQI+ youth through the primary interventions and counselling strategies that support the basic psychological needs of learners.

## Limitations

A major limitation of this scoping review is the low number of studies published in South Africa focusing on the experiences of learners of the teaching approach of the CSE syllabus. An additional limitation is that the predominant sample group in the publications focusing on learner perceptions of how teachers' beliefs influence their approach to teach gender fluidity and LGBT-related topics was

feedback from female learners. The articles included in this scoping review include original articles to map the scope of publications to better understand the learner's experiences of learning the CSE curriculum and identify gaps in educator training that need to be adjusted. Another limitation, as argued by Bailey and Graves (2016), is that reviews such as this are political and partial; even they provide an understanding of the scholarly trend in both creating and reflecting the field. In addition, the studies included in this review were not assessed for bias, and bias may likely present across included studies. To avoid selection bias, all available published studies on this topic were identified and reviewed. These limitations aside, a scoping review of how learners experience the sexuality education curriculum in South Africa is an essential contribution to education research in South Africa because it has demonstrated a scholarly trend found in sexuality and gender education in sub-Saharan Africa. Secondly, this scoping review is of great significance as a novel topic reviewed with recent literature. This review provides teachers and the government an opportunity to develop and implement effective workshops and educator training to address the issue of sexual and gender diversity.

## **Conclusion**

Given that the goal of the CSE subject matter is to reduce the infection rates of HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and to make healthy life choices, then it can be argued that the goal is only being met when learners of all sexuality and gender identities have been considered when teaching the subject matter. In conclusion, the teaching styles of teachers in South Africa, influenced by their beliefs and biases, are not inclusive of all gender and sexuality identities. The teaching styles used by teachers ignore non-heteronormative and gender non-normative identities and push for classic gender roles. Consequently, this threatens the identities of all learners who do not identify with the taught gender and sexuality roles because it creates feelings of rejection and prejudice, marginalising their identities as other. Based on these findings, we recommend that a conversation about the transformation of the CSE subject matter be opened, which reflects and addresses the views and concerns of both learners and teachers. Considerations of learners' need for safe and healthy life choices, which is in line with the current social environment that is inclusive of the LGBTQI+ community, may require changes to take place both in the curriculum material and the teachers' teaching approach.

In terms of the teachers, workshops should consider allowing space for teachers to voice their beliefs and concerns of identity in teaching the subject, and create solutions on how to teach new content on fluid sexualities and gender roles without communicating implicit biases. Such workshops are aptly aligned to the main tenets of ITT. In terms of the curriculum, we argue that more structured activity plans should be built in to allow for interactions and a platform for conversations. It is only through open conversations with learners in a safe space that we can begin to view culturally sensitive topics in a new light and make adjustments that create a social change. Finally, the curriculum should not be limited by a bias towards patriarchal dominant heteronormative pedagogy. It should be inclusive of information that allows learners' questions on gender, sexuality, and power roles in relationships to be answered in the more updated context of the world.

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