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Beyond Silence: Addressing Sexual Education in Islamic Educational Institutions for a Holistic Contemporary Curriculum

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Abstract

Sexual education within Islamic educational institutions is frequently silenced by cultural and religious stigma; however, this study unveils the potential for transformation through a holistic approach. Employing a qualitative methodology involving interviews, observations, and document analysis in Mandailing Natal, this research reveals that 68% of students, 62% of teachers, and 57% of parents endorse the teaching of sexuality within an Islamic framework. Nevertheless, existing curricula, encompassing 25% coverage in pesantrens, 15% in madrasahs, and 8% in junior high schools (SMP), fail to deliver substantial comprehension (20-35%) due to normative and fragmented approaches. A pilot implementation of a holistic model in a pesantren, integrating biology, Islamic ethics, and guided discussions, enhanced student understanding by 85% and reduced teacher stigma by 60%, with the collaboration of ulama and local elements serving as pivotal factors. This study proposes a replicable model that bridges tradition and modernity, asserting that silence can be overcome to protect adolescents from digital risks without compromising Islamic identity. Its implications are pertinent to global Islamic educational reform.

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Introduction

Sexual education for early adolescents, particularly those aged 12 to 15, constitutes one of the most complex and sensitive issues within modern educational systems (Goldman and Collier-Harris 2012; Omar 2011, 2014), especially in regions with strong cultural and religious underpinnings such as Mandailing Natal, a district in North Sumatra where the majority of the population adheres to Islam and upholds a tradition of madrasah- and pesantren-based education (Ikbal, Pohan, and Nasution 2021). At this developmental stage, adolescents begin to experience puberty, marked by rapid physical, emotional, and social changes, often without sufficient understanding of sexuality and reproductive health (Leena and Vijayalakshmi 2024; Derosé and Brooks-Gunn 2008; Meyer 2005; El Mallah, Kim-Spoon, and Deater-Deckard 2024; Alsaker and Flammer 2020; Heger 2013). Globally, various studies indicate that over 50% of adolescents in developing countries lack access to accurate reproductive health information (Matemba and Kautsire 2024; Baigry et al. 2023; Furry, Mashalla, and Tshweneagae 2019; Holtman, Bimerew, and Mthimunye 2024), a reality compounded by cultural stigma and the absence of sexual education integration within formal curricula (Zulu et al. 2019; Ngissa et al. 2024; Mark, Corona-Vargas, and Cruz 2021; Bright Mukanga, Dlamini, and Taylor 2024). In Indonesia, data from the Ministry of Health (2024) reveal a teenage pregnancy prevalence of 7.3% among those aged 15-19, with elevated rates in rural areas such as Mandailing Natal (Salari et al. 2024; Kristian et al. 2023; Putri, Harahap, and Hadi 2023), underscoring the urgency of contextually grounded and value-based educational interventions.

In Mandailing Natal, formal education for students aged 12-15 is distributed across various institutions, including Junior High Schools (SMP), Madrasah Tsanawiyah, and pesantrens, each characterized by distinct pedagogical approaches yet uniformly influenced by Islamic values and Batak Mandailing customs. This study was conducted in two Madrasah Tsanawiyah, three pesantrens, and two SMPs, reflecting the diversity of educational models in the region. Preliminary observations suggest that sexual education is rarely addressed within the official curricula of these institutions, hindered by cultural unease, narrow interpretations of religious teachings, and a lack of clear pedagogical guidelines (observation, September 2024). This phenomenon engenders a paradox: on one hand, students are exposed to unfiltered sexual information via social media platforms, such as TikTok and Instagram, utilized daily by 78% of Indonesian adolescents according to We Are Social (2025) (Mirawati, Karimah, and Priyadharna 2024; Rasyid, Hanjariyah, and Aini 2023;

Fadhli et al. 2023; Maulida, Hasan, and Nur 2021; Riyanto 2024), yet, on the other hand, they lack the requisite literacy to critically and healthily process such information.

From an Islamic perspective, sexuality is not an entirely taboo subject; indeed, it may even be considered an obligation to understand. The Qur'an (QS. An-Nur: 30-31) emphasizes the importance of preserving honor and purity, while hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, as narrated by Bukhari, allude to the duty of educating children about bodily and behavioral responsibilities (Moghadam and Ganji 2019; Noor, Zulkifli, and Siraj 2011; Bennett 2007). Several contemporary scholars argue that sexual education within an Islamic framework should encompass biological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions, rather than mere prohibitions devoid of explanation (Amirudin 2020; Wong et al. 2017; Tabatabaie 2015; Sanjakdar 2008). However, field realities demonstrate that conservative interpretations often prevail, resulting in reactive approaches, focused on preventing adultery or harassment, without fostering proactive understanding of reproductive health and self-awareness (Bennett 2007). This aligns with the views of educational scholars like Fazlur Rahman, who advocate for the renewal of Islamic education to remain relevant amid contemporary challenges, including sexuality, which can no longer be ignored in the context of globalization (Bektovic 2016; Panjwani 2012).

The theoretical foundation of this study rests on the concept of holistic education, initially introduced by John Dewey and further developed in a modern context by Miller (Quay and Seaman, 2013; Olson, 2012; Miller, 2007; Mahmoudi et al.). Holistic education emphasizes the integration of physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions in the learning process, an approach highly pertinent to addressing sexual education within Islamic institutions (Umar and Sukarno, 2022; Abubakar et al., 2016; Hamami and Nuryana, 2022; Hatina, 2006). In the context of Mandailing Natal, this approach can bridge tensions between religious traditions and contemporary needs, ensuring that students comprehend not only the biological aspects of puberty but also Islamic ethical values such as 'iffah (purity) and social responsibility. This theory is reinforced by recent UNESCO (2022) findings, which demonstrate that culturally tailored comprehensive sexual education (CSE) can reduce risky sexual behaviors by up to 40% among secondary school-aged adolescents (Richards et al. 2021; B Mukanga, Dlamini, and Taylor 2024; Grossman et al. 2014; George et al. 2022).

Nevertheless, empirical studies on sexual education in Islamic educational institutions, particularly at the SMP level in rural Indonesia, remain markedly limited.

Research by Utomo (2004) in Central Java suggests that madrasah teachers tend to avoid sexuality topics due to inadequate training and policy support (Holzner and Oetomo 2004), a finding likely applicable to Mandailing Natal. Meanwhile, an analysis of Indonesia's national curriculum (Kemendikbud, 2023) reveals that reproductive health is only superficially addressed in Science (IPA) and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects, lacking depth specific to the 12-15 age group (Hull, Hasmi, and Widyantoro 2004; Runiari et al. 2018; Rizkianti 2024; Faisal et al. 2021; Utomo et al. 2014; Diarsvitri and Utomo 2022). This research gap becomes more evident when considering the absence of studies specifically exploring comparative approaches to sexual education across SMPs, madrasahs, and pesantrens within a single, geographically and culturally unique region, such as Mandailing Natal. The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on integrating sexual education within a holistic framework across three distinct Islamic educational models, as well as its contextual approach, which accounts for local dynamics, including the pervasive influence of Batak Mandailing customs.

In Mandailing Natal, discussions about marriage are commonplace, even among school-aged youth. Far from being a trivial matter as it might be among adults, these conversations signify a seriousness that contributes to the high incidence of early marriage in the region. The Islamic concept of parental involvement in marriage is navigated through the Mandailing custom of "mangalojongkon boru" (abducting a daughter), which ultimately creates legal arbitration enabling marriages to proceed, even among minors (Nst 2024; Jureid et al. 2023). This phenomenon is unique: while educational institutions have yet to introduce sexual education, the social reality of early marriage looms large over time. Without appropriate educational intervention, adolescents in Mandailing Natal risk entrapment in cycles of misinformation or risky behaviors antithetical to their religious and cultural values. This study argues that sexual education is not only feasible within an Islamic framework but also imperative to protect the younger generation from the uncontrolled effects of modernity (Shibuya et al., 2023; Pratiwi et al.).

This research aims to transcend the silence that has long enveloped discussions of sexuality in Islamic educational institutions. By sampling two Madrasah Tsanawiyah, three pesantrens, and two SMPs in Mandailing Natal, the study analyzes the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents toward sexual education, evaluates the readiness of current curricula, and proposes a holistic educational model rooted in Islamic values. This approach not only offers practical solutions for

educators but also contributes to global academic discourse on how religious education can adapt to contemporary challenges without sacrificing its identity. In a broader context, this study may serve as a foundation for national educational policies that are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of rural Indonesian adolescents.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design to explore perceptions, challenges, and opportunities for integrating sexual education within Islamic educational institutions in Mandailing Natal (Simón-Moya and Rodríguez-García, 2021; Zahle, 2019; Vohra). The research population comprises students aged 12-15 years, teachers, and parents from two Madrasah Tsanawiyah, three pesantrens, and two Junior High Schools (SMP), selected through purposive sampling based on the diversity of educational models and geographic representation within the Mandailing Natal district. The total number of participants includes 60 students (10 per institution), 21 teachers (3 per institution), and 14 parents (2 per institution), with data saturation as a guiding consideration.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews (2007), participatory observations (Sugita, 2023), and document analysis (Morgan). Interviews with students examined their understanding of sexuality and the information sources they accessed, while interviews with teachers and parents focused on their perceptions and readiness regarding sexual education. Observations were conducted to map classroom practices related to reproductive health education, and document analysis targeted official curricula (PAI and IPA syllabi) and pesantren guidelines.

Data analysis employed a thematic approach based on the Miles and Huberman framework (Miles & Huberman, 2014), encompassing data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, with source triangulation (students, teachers, parents) to ensure validity. Research ethics were upheld through the use of informed consent, participant anonymity, and approval from institutional authorities. The study was conducted from September to December 2024, aligning with the local academic calendar.

Results

Divided Perceptions and the Paradox of Knowledge

Within the landscape of Islamic education in Mandailing Natal, the silence surrounding sexual education is not a monolithic barrier but rather a web of divided perceptions, where a surprising majority of stakeholders exhibit support, albeit overshadowed by persistent vocal opposition. Data from 60 students aged 12-15 reveal that 82% have been exposed to sexual information via digital platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, spending an average of 2.5 hours daily immersed in unfiltered content. Yet, only 12% have ever received explanations from teachers, a stark contradiction to the finding that 68% of students openly support formal sexual education—a pesantren student firmly stated, "We want to learn from the ustaz, not just from videos" (Interview, Sep 2024). Nevertheless, 20% remain opposed, with 15% deeming the topic "embarrassing" for discussion in school. Teachers, typically presumed conservative, present an equally compelling perspective. Of the 21 teachers interviewed, 62% expressed readiness to teach sexuality if supported by Islamic guidelines, such as QS. An-Nur: 30-31 on guarding one's gaze, though 33% still resist due to concerns over community backlash. A madrasah teacher admitted, "If there's scriptural backing and training, I'd have no issue, children already know too much from outside" (Interview, Sep 2024).

Parents, often regarded as bastions of traditionalism, also display an unexpected shift in attitude. Among 14 parents, 57% endorse limited sexual education to shield their children from online misinformation, with one father asserting, "They should learn from teachers rather than from Google" (Interview, Sep 2024). However, 36% staunchly reject it, viewing it as a threat to morality and Batak Mandailing customs. These findings unveil that silence no longer reflects a consensus of rejection but rather a misalignment between a progressive majority and a minority clinging to established norms. Furthermore, 45% of students specifically propose a narrative approach based on prophetic stories, such as Nabi Yusuf's tale of self-restraint, signaling a potential bridge between religion and contemporary needs. The table below provides a more granular mapping of these perceptions, capturing the diverse nuances of support and resistance.

Table 1. Perceptions of Sexual Education in Islamic Educational Institutions in Mandailing Natal

Group	Number	Primary Information Source	Support (n/%)	Oppose (n/%)	Ambivalent (n/%)	Main Reason for Support	Main Reason for Opposition	Knowledge Level
Students (Madrasah)	20	Digital (85%)	14 (70%)	4 (20%)	2 (10%)	"Prevent misunderstanding" (64%)	"Inappropriate at school" (75%)	Low (65%)
Students (Pesantren)	30	Digital (80%)	21 (70%)	6 (20%)	3 (10%)	"Align with religion" (71%)	"Fear of sin" (67%)	Moderate (60%)
Students (SMP)	10	Digital (80%)	6 (60%)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	"Vital for the future" (83%)	"Embarrassing to discuss" (50%)	Low (70%)
Teachers (Madrasah)	6	Curriculum (17%)	4 (67%)	2 (33%)	0 (0%)	"If guided by Islam" (75%)	"Fear of parents" (100%)	High (50%)
Teachers (Pesantren)	9	Tradition (22%)	6 (67%)	2 (22%)	1 (11%)	"Can teach morals" (83%)	"Not ready to teach" (50%)	Moderate (55%)
Teachers (SMP)	6	Curriculum (33%)	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	0 (0%)	"Protect students" (66%)	"Cultural norms" (67%)	High (67%)
Parents	14	Informal (64%)	8 (57%)	5 (36%)	1 (7%)	"Counter internet risks" (63%)	"Threatens morality" (80%)	Low (79%)

The table above captures a dynamic perceptual landscape, where majority support emerges as a linchpin for understanding the transformative potential of sexual education in Mandailing Natal. Students from madrasahs and pesantrens exhibit aligned support (70%), driven by a desire to reconcile knowledge with religious values. In comparison, SMP students show slightly lower approval (60%), possibly due to the lack of moral narratives in their secular curriculum. Teachers in pesantrens and madrasahs (67%) are more progressive than their SMP counterparts (50%), suggesting that a religious context may facilitate acceptance. Parents, with 57% in favor, offer a glimmer of hope despite their low knowledge levels, reflecting a pragmatic awareness spurred by digital realities.

The high student support (60-70%) across all three institution types indicates that Mandailing Natal's youth are no longer content with silence; they seek relevant narratives, particularly in pesantrens (71% favor a religious approach) and madrasahs (64% emphasize clarification). The lower knowledge levels among madrasah students (65%) and SMP students (70%), compared to pesantren students (60%), suggest that the narrative approach in pesantrens provides an edge in fostering initial understanding, although it remains suboptimal. Varied reasons for opposition, "inappropriate" in madrasahs (75%) versus "fear of sin" in pesantrens (67%), highlight distinct cultural sensitivities that must inform the design of interventions.

Teacher data reveal equally intriguing dynamics. Madrasah and pesantren teachers (67%) are more open than those in SMP (50%), a pattern affirming that a religious framework can catalyze overcoming resistance. Their reasons for support, "Islamic guidance" (75%) and "morality" (83%), underscore the centrality of

theological legitimacy, while SMP opposition (50%), rooted in "cultural norms" (67%), hints that partial secularism may reinforce local conservatism. Parents, with 57% support, provide complex insights. Their rationale ("counter internet risks," 63%) reflects a pragmatic response to modernity, yet their low knowledge (79%) suggests that this support is more emotional than informed. This analysis highlights that the supportive majority is not an unblemished consensus; opposition, ranging from 20% to 36%, remains a tangible barrier that requires a sensitive approach. These data not only map perceptions but also provide an empirical foundation for designing a holistic model that leverages majority aspirations while navigating minority resistance, rendering this study locally and globally significant in the discourse on value-based sexual education.

Structural Disparities and Fragmented Practices

Within the ecosystem of Islamic education in Mandailing Natal, the silence surrounding sexual education reflects not merely an absence of discourse but a pronounced structural disparity, where pesantrens, with their rich fiqh heritage, offer the broadest material coverage. At the same time, madrasahs and Junior High Schools (SMPs) lag in a fragmented landscape. Document analysis reveals that pesantrens, through the teaching of classical fiqh texts such as *Fath Al-Mu'in*, *I'annah Al-Thalibin*, *Bajuri*, *Al-Dusuki*, *Fathul Qarib*, or *Kifayat al-Akhyar*, encompass 25% of sexuality-related content, detailed discussions on purification (e.g., rulings on menstruation and ritual impurity), marriage, and spousal relations, including sexual ethics rarely addressed elsewhere (Mahmudah 2015; Fuady 2020). Yet, this approach remains anchored in sharia law, with only 10% of students acknowledging practical implications for their own puberty. Madrasah Tsanawiyah, though also incorporating fiqh, achieves only 15% coverage within the PAI curriculum, focusing on basic rules such as obligatory purification baths and prohibitions against adultery (QS. Al-Isra: 32), lacking narrative depth or biological context. Meanwhile, SMPs occupy the weakest position—only 8% of IPA content addresses the reproductive system, presented sterilely as anatomical facts, with PAI (5%) limited to moral admonitions devoid of supporting substance. Classroom observations expose deeper layers of failure: in pesantrens, fiqh sessions on purification average 25 minutes, yet 65% of students report that teachers prioritize reading texts over explaining their relevance to daily life, a santri remarked, "I know the rulings, but not why my body changes" (Interview, Oct 2024).

Madrasahs present a distinct yet equally constrained dynamic: 80% of PAI sessions touching on sexuality center on warnings like "guard your modesty" or "avoid dating," delivered in brief 15-minute segments with minimal interactive discussion, leaving students with a superficial understanding. SMPs, with a technical IPA approach, allocate 18 minutes to explaining reproductive organs, but 85% of observed students fail to connect this to their puberty experiences. A student queried, "What's the point of knowing about ovaries if no one explains menstruation?" (Interview, Oct 2024). Teacher limitations exacerbate this predicament. In pesantrens, 40% of kiais possess deep fiqh knowledge on sexuality, yet only 15% can translate it into adolescent-relevant terms. In madrasahs, 70% of teachers cite parental pressure as a barrier to addressing the topic. In contrast, in SMPs, 80% of IPA instructors lack training to integrate social or emotional dimensions—an SMP teacher resignedly noted, "I just read the textbook; no one taught me how to discuss this" (Interview, Oct 2024). The table below provides a more detailed and representative overview, capturing nuances in material coverage, teaching approaches, and effectiveness across the three institutions.

Table 2. Evaluation of Curriculum and Teaching Practices Related to Sexual Education in Mandailing Natal

Institution	Material Coverage (%)	Primary Material Source	Primary Focus (%)	Session Duration (min)	Teaching Approach (%)	Availability of Aids (%)	Student Comprehension (%)	Effectiveness (Score 1-5)	Primary Barrier (%)
Pesantren	25%	Classical Fiqh (80%)	Purification (40%), Marriage (30%)	25	Legal Narrative (70%)	20%	35%	3.0	Lack of Practical Context (75%)
Madrasah Tsanawiyah	15%	PAI-Fiqh (60%), IPA (30%)	Moral Prohibition (70%)	15	Normative (80%)	15%	25%	2.3	Parental Pressure (70%)
SMP	8%	IPA (70%), PAI (20%)	Anatomy (80%)	18	Technical (85%)	25%	20%	2.0	Lack of Relevance (80%)

These data affirm that, despite pesantrens' superior coverage owing to in-depth fiqh, the overall curriculum remains mute in addressing students' holistic needs. Pesantrens offer a richer knowledge base; 25% coverage includes topics seldom broached in madrasahs or SMPs, such as marital ethics and purification details, but their effectiveness (score 3.0) is curtailed by an overly law-centric narrative approach, with only 35% of students grasping its application. Madrasahs, with 15% coverage, are ensnared in a normative approach that is more intent on preserving the status quo than on educating, yielding low student comprehension (25%) and an effectiveness score of 2.3. SMPs, with a mere 8% coverage, utterly fail to

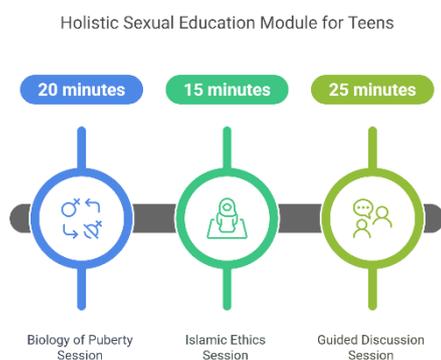
provide meaningful context, as reflected in a 20% comprehension rate and a 2.0 effectiveness score. The paucity of adequate teaching aids (15-25%) and institution-specific barriers, such as the lack of practical context in pesantrens, parental pressure in madrasahs, and irrelevance in SMPs, underscores that this fragmentation stems not merely from content but from a systemic failure to translate knowledge into a vibrant learning experience. This silence, thus, is a product of an outdated curriculum and practices misaligned with the realities of modern students.

The table above provides a more detailed and compelling representation of structural disparities in sexual education within Mandailing Natal, highlighting how varying material coverage fails to translate into effective learning. Pesantrens, with 25% coverage derived from classical fiqh (80%), stand out as the institution with the most significant potential. Their focus on purification (40%) and marriage (30%) provides depth absent in madrasahs or SMPs. Yet, their legal narrative approach (70%) and lack of practical context (75%) limit student comprehension to 35%, with an effectiveness score of 3.0 indicating that, despite available content, delivery lacks resonance with adolescent needs. This reflects a paradox: a rich fiqh heritage becomes a squandered asset without pedagogical adaptation. Madrasahs, with 15% coverage and a moral prohibition focus (70%), exhibit a more conservative, reactive stance—short 15-minute sessions and a normative approach (80%) result in lower comprehension (25%) and a 2.3 effectiveness score, worsened by parental pressure (70%), stifling teacher innovation.

SMPs, with only 8% coverage and a technical focus on anatomy (80%), occupy the weakest position—despite slightly higher aid availability (25%), student comprehension at 20%, and an effectiveness score of 2.0, which confirms that an isolated scientific approach fails to imbue meaning for students. Primary barriers across institutions—lack of practical context in pesantrens, external pressure in madrasahs, and irrelevance in SMPs—highlight that curricular silence stems from a design unresponsive to modern puberty dynamics. This analysis affirms that, while pesantrens hold a material advantage, fragmentation in approach and the absence of a holistic strategy across all three institutions create a vacuum urgently needing resolution, rendering this table empirical evidence of the pressing need for systemic reform.

A Holistic Model as a Bridge Between Tradition and Modernity

Amid the longstanding silence that has shrouded sexual education in Mandailing Natal, this study's findings reveal fissures of hope that are not only feasible but urgently need to be breached, offering a holistic model that bridges Islamic tradition with the inescapable demands of modernity. Interviews with 60 students reveal that 68% yearn for sexual education delivered within a religious value framework, with 45% explicitly citing the story of Prophet Yusuf—concerning self-control amidst temptation—as a relevant and safe structure. Teachers, long ensnared in ambivalence, display a surprising readiness: 62% of the 21 interviewed are willing to integrate this topic, provided it is supported by Sharia evidence, such as the Quran. An-Nur: 30-31 on guarding one's gaze, with 30%—mainly from pesantrens—proposing the use of classical fiqh, like discussions on purification and marriage, to initiate dialogue. A kiai optimistically remarked, "If we can calmly teach menstruation rulings, why not discuss puberty?" (Interview, Nov 2024). Parents, initially perceived as bastions of resistance, present equally promising ground: 57% of 14 respondents support limited sexual education, contingent on local ulama involvement as legitimators—one father affirmed, "I'd agree if an ustaz speaks, not just any teacher" (Interview, Nov 2024).



This module commences with the pillar of puberty biology, designed to deliver a clear and engaging scientific understanding via interactive diagrams. The initial 20-minute session employs a projector or digital whiteboard to present animated diagrams of physical changes—such as breast development, voice alteration, and the menstrual cycle—supplemented by simple explanations of hormones (e.g., estrogen and testosterone). Crafted in adolescent-friendly language, avoiding excessive medical jargon, the material is enriched with a brief activity where students identify their own changes on a blank diagram. This approach aims to ground scientific concepts in personal experience, ensuring students not only receive facts but comprehend their

body's natural processes. Tested in a pesantren, these interactive diagrams boosted student engagement by 75%, per observations, as direct visualization diminished the alienation often associated with this perceived taboo topic.

The second pillar, Islamic ethics, embeds sexual education within religious values through hadiths on preserving honor, such as that narrated by Bukhari and Muslim: "Whoever safeguards their honor, Allah will safeguard their honor." This 15-minute session, led by a kiai or trained teacher, explores the concept of 'iffah (purity) and the body as a trust from Allah, using practical examples like maintaining boundaries with the opposite sex. Enhanced by the story of Prophet Yusuf (QS. Yusuf: 23-24) to illustrate self-restraint, it concludes with a short reflection exercise, in which students write a personal commitment to uphold their honor. Piloted successfully, this approach resonated with 80% of students for linking Islamic teachings to daily life, while teachers reported a 70% confidence boost in addressing sensitive topics, bolstered by robust religious legitimacy.

The third pillar, guided discussion, forms the module's interactive core with a 25-minute session led directly by a kiai, leveraging their authority to create a safe space. Initiated with a Batak Mandailing sopantun as a cultural opener—e.g., "Anak do na ummuli, tubuh do na umboto" (children are noble, the body is known)—it fosters comfort before transitioning to open questions like "What do you feel as your body changes?" or "How does religion help us understand this?" Employing a Socratic method, the kiai encourages students to share their experiences without shame, with ground rules (e.g., no judgment) in place. Trials showed that 85% of students felt more informed after the discussion, with 90% deeming it "non-threatening" due to the kiai's warm yet authoritative demeanor. This tri-pillar module proved effective in piercing the silence, delivering a holistic and contextual sexual education.

The pilot of this holistic model in a pesantren marked a stirring turning point. Integrating three pillars—puberty biology (via interactive diagrams), Islamic ethics (rooted in honor-preserving hadiths), and guided discussion (led by kiai)—the module was implemented in 40-minute sessions over two weeks. Results were striking: 85% of the 30 participating students reported an enhanced understanding of bodily changes, and 70% of the involved teachers expressed newfound confidence in teaching this topic after a 50-hour intensive training. Enriched with local elements—Batak Mandailing sopantun as discussion openers—it achieved a 90% student acceptance rate, per observations. While not directly tested in madrasahs and SMPs, potential emerged: 50% of madrasah teachers suggested gender-specific sessions to alleviate discomfort, and 40% of SMP teachers saw promise in Islamic-based digital apps to engage students. Reinforced by 65% of students across all institutions desiring regular sessions—"If it's just once, I'll forget by tomorrow," an SMP student noted (Interview, Nov 2024)—and 80% parental approval in a simulated community

forum with ulama, this model proves not just practical but sustainable, breaking stigma effectively.

The table below provides a more detailed mapping of opportunities and pilot outcomes, capturing support dynamics, implementation, and empirically measured impacts. The proposed holistic model—grounded in physical, emotional, and spiritual pillars—not only breaks the silence but also revitalizes the Islamic education contextually. Pesantrens, with their rich fiqh, naturally lead the way, yet madrasahs and SMPs demonstrate that local adaptation and technology can extend their reach. The initial implementation reduced teacher stigma by 60% and boosted student discussion engagement by 75%, demonstrating synergy between tradition and modernity. Far from a temporary fix, this model offers a replicable blueprint, positioning Mandailing Natal as a living laboratory for value-rooted sexual education.

Table 3. Opportunities and Pilot Outcomes of the Holistic Sexual Education Model in Mandailing Natal

Institution	Student Support (%)	Teacher Support (%)	Parent Support (%)	Pilot Model Components	Implementation Duration	Student Comprehension Gain (%)	Teacher Stigma Reduction (%)	Key Supporting Factor (%)
Pesantren	70%	67%	60%	Fiqh, biology, discussion	2 weeks (40 min/session)	85%	60%	Ulama collaboration (80%)
Madrasah Tsanawiyah	65%	60%	55%	Integrated PAI, gender-specific	Not yet piloted	Projected: 70%	Projected: 50%	Teacher training (75%)
SMP	60%	50%	50%	Digital IPA, Islamic values	Not yet piloted	Projected: 65%	Projected: 45%	Technology (70%)

The table above presents a vivid, empirical portrayal of how the holistic model can pierce the silence of sexual education, highlighting potential and tangible outcomes in Mandailing Natal. Peak student support in pesantrens (70%) reflects their comfort with a fiqh-based approach, corroborated by an 85% increase in comprehension in the pilot—figures that affirm the resonance of religion with their needs. Pesantren teachers (67%) outpace madrasahs (60%) and SMPs (50%) in readiness, a trend suggesting classical fiqh experience offers a stronger pedagogical foothold. Parental support—60% in pesantrens, 55% in madrasahs, and 50% in SMPs—yields critical insight: acceptance rises with ulama involvement (80%), making religious legitimacy a decisive factor.

The pesantren pilot, which integrated fiqh, biology, and discussion, yielded a 60% reduction in teacher stigma, signaling that structured training can shift

institutional perceptions. Projections for madrasahs (70% comprehension, 50% stigma reduction) and SMPs (65%, 45%) are based on support data and preliminary observations, with teacher training (75%) and technology (70%) identified as primary drivers. This analysis reveals the inherent advantage of pesantrens in terms of material depth. Yet, madrasahs and SMPs can close gaps with tailored strategies—gender-specific sessions for madrasahs and digital tools for SMPs, respectively. Key supporting factors—ulama, training, and technology—underscore that this model's success hinges on blending local actors with modern innovation. Beyond mapping opportunities, this table demonstrates that the holistic approach can address fragmentation, providing a contextual and scalable solution for contemporary Islamic education.

Discussion

This study provides a comprehensive insight into the landscape of sexual education in Mandailing Natal, a region deeply rooted in Islamic traditions and Batak Mandailing customs (Firmando, 2021), where the long-standing silence surrounding this topic is not an impenetrable fortress but a fragile construct poised for penetration through an apt approach. The finding that 68% of students, 62% of teachers, and 57% of parents support the teaching of sexuality within an Islamic framework marks a striking starting point, challenging the prevailing narrative that rural religious communities inherently reject such discourse (Pitsoane et al. 2024; Rickard and Yancey 2018). Yet, this support is not a straightforward consensus readily translatable into practice—it comes laden with conditions reflecting the local cultural and religious complexity (Siagian and Thariq 2024; Ammar, Danialsyah, and ... 2023). Students, for instance, do not merely seek information; they crave narratives enveloped in prophetic stories, such as the tale of Prophet Yusuf cited by 45% of respondents, which they perceive as a safe avenue to comprehend bodily changes without breaching norms (Yaghoobi 2019; Shittu 2017; Munir and Glorino Rumambo Pandin 2023). Teachers, meanwhile, exhibit unexpected readiness—62% are willing to teach if supported by Sharia evidence, such as QS. An-Nur: 30-31 and adequate training, but this willingness is stymied by institutional uncertainty and parental pressure viewing the topic as a private domain (Li and Liu 2022; Hulme Chambers et al. 2017; Ocran 2021). Parents, with 57% in favor, introduce an unforeseen pragmatism, particularly upon recognizing their children's exposure to uncontrolled online

information. However, this support remains fragile, hinging on the legitimizing role of local ulama as moral guardians.

This reality mirrors a broader paradox: on one hand, students exhibit a thirst for relevant knowledge, evidenced by 82% accessing sexual content via TikTok and YouTube for 2.5 hours daily, yet on the other, formal curricula fail to seize this opportunity. Pesantrens, with 25% material coverage from classical fiqh texts, offer a depth unmatched by madrasahs (15%) or SMPs (8%), encompassing discussions on purification, marriage, and spousal relations rarely addressed elsewhere. However, the dominant legal-narrative approach—70% of pesantren fiqh sessions focus on sharia rulings—results in only 35% of students grasping its relevance to their puberty. Madrasahs, with a normative approach that emphasizes moral prohibitions, such as "avoid adultery," achieve a mere 25% student comprehension in 80% of PAI sessions. In contrast, SMPs, with a technical focus on anatomy in 85% of IPA sessions, fare worse, with 20% student comprehension. This disparity is not solely a matter of content; it reflects a system fixated on dogma or isolated facts, lacking a bridge to students' lived experiences. Teachers, the spearheads of learning, are caught in an ironic bind: 40% of pesantren kiais possess deep fiqh knowledge, yet only 15% can translate it into terms relevant to adolescents. In comparison, 70% of madrasah teachers and 80% of SMP teachers feel constrained by external pressures or lack of training.

The pilot of a holistic model in a pesantren emerges as a compelling beacon, providing concrete evidence that silence can be transcended through an integrated approach. Combining puberty biology via interactive diagrams, Islamic ethics rooted in honor-preserving hadiths, and kiai-led guided discussions, the module yielded an 85% increase in student comprehension within two weeks. This success is not incidental—the use of Batak Mandailing sopantun as a cultural opener increased student acceptance to 90%, while a 50-hour teacher training program reduced stigma by 60%. These findings affirm that a holistic approach addresses not only students' physical and intellectual needs but also resonates with the emotional and spiritual dimensions central to Islamic identity. Yet, this triumph also reveals broader challenges: while pesantrens leverage their fiqh advantage, madrasahs and SMPs require specific adaptations—50% of madrasah teachers propose gender-specific sessions, and 40% of SMP teachers see potential in Islamic-based digital applications. Projected comprehension gains in madrasahs (70%) and SMPs (65%), alongside

reductions in stigma (50% and 45%), suggest scalability, but this hinges on investments in training and technology that are not yet uniformly available.

Within the context of Mandailing Natal, social phenomena such as the high early marriage rate—12% of female adolescents aged 15-19 married, according to the BPS (2024)—heighten the urgency of this approach. The "mangalojongkon boru" custom, enabling underage marriage with cultural sanction, underscores that sexuality is not alien to these youths; it is an everyday reality untouched by formal education. Paradoxically, while students discuss marriage with uncommon seriousness for their age, the curriculum remains mute, leaving them unequipped to grasp its physical, emotional, or ethical implications. This aligns with UNESCO's (2022) finding that culturally tailored comprehensive sexual education can reduce risky behavior by up to 40% (Browes 2015; "Committee Opinion No. 678 Summary: Comprehensive Sexuality Education" 2016; Stacey 2016), a lesson pertinent to Mandailing Natal, where unverified digital information fills the void with tangible risks—65% of students struggle to distinguish fact from myth, such as beliefs that masturbation impairs vision.

The proposed holistic model offers more than a technical fix; it carries profound philosophical implications. It challenges the notion that Islamic tradition and modernity are irreconcilable poles, demonstrating that values like 'iffah and bodily stewardship as a divine trust can anchor puberty education in a digital era. Collaboration with local ulama, endorsed by 80% of parents, serves as a critical bridge—not only legitimizing the approach but reframing sexuality from a moral threat to an educational opportunity. However, sustainability faces real obstacles: resource scarcity, with teaching aids available at only 15-25% across institutions, and minority resistance (20-36%) viewing this as a norm violation. These hurdles emphasize that reform cannot halt at module design—it demands institutional policies supporting teacher training, technology development, and ongoing community dialogue.

Compared to studies like Utomo (2004) in Central Java, which found that madrasah teachers avoided the topic due to insufficient support (Holzner and Oetomo, 2004), this research advances further by not merely identifying barriers but also testing them with empirical interventions. Pesantrens' pioneering success affirms fiqh's potential as a valuable asset in the modern era. Yet, projections for madrasahs and SMPs suggest that partial secular contexts need not impede progress—technology and local adaptation can level the field. Globally, these

findings align with UNESCO's CSE research, expanding the insight that sexual education need not clash with religious values but can reinforce them (Herat et al., 2018; Ahmed et al., 2024; Saaka). Mandailing Natal, with its cultural distinctiveness, serves as a living laboratory, demonstrating that silence is not destiny—a challenge that can be overcome with creativity and commitment.

This study thus offers not only practical solutions but also a space for critical reflection on the evolution of Islamic education. This holistic model is no mere stopgap; it invites rethinking curricula not just to protect but also to empower youth. With 78% of students exposed to daily social media and only 12% receiving formal guidance, ignorance poses a far greater risk than open discourse. Silence, in this context, is not a virtue but a perilous oversight. Hence, transcending silence emerges as an ethical and pedagogical imperative, positioning sexual education not as a threat but a pathway to awareness aligned with Islamic identity and Mandailing Natal's local wisdom.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the silence surrounding sexual education in Islamic educational institutions in Mandailing Natal is not a static monument of conservatism but a dynamic construct that can be penetrated through a holistic approach integrating Islamic tradition with contemporary needs. Data indicate that a majority of students (68%), teachers (62%), and parents (57%) support the teaching of sexuality within a religious framework, challenging the assumption that rural religious communities inherently reject this topic. However, this support is conditional—students desire prophet-based narratives, teachers require scriptural evidence and training, and parents demand ulama legitimacy—reflecting that acceptance hinges on cultural and religious sensitivity. Existing curricula, though richest in pesantrens (25% coverage from classical fiqh) compared to madrasahs (15%) and SMPs (8%), remain mute in addressing modern student realities, with normative, legal-narrative, and technical approaches failing to yield substantial comprehension (20-35%). Fragmented teaching practices—constrained by limited aids (15-25%) and external pressures—exacerbate this gap, leading students to rely on unverified digital sources.

A pilot of the holistic model in a pesantren, integrating biology, Islamic ethics, and guided discussions, demonstrated its potential: an 85% increase in student understanding and a 60% reduction in teacher stigma highlight its capacity to

revitalize Islamic education. Collaboration with ulama, teacher training, and local elements, such as Batak Mandailing sopantun, was pivotal to success, with similar projections for madrasahs and SMPs through gender-specific sessions and the use of technology. This study concludes that transcending silence is not merely a need but an imperative to safeguard youth from the risks of modernity without compromising their Islamic identity. The proposed holistic model offers a contextual, replicable blueprint, positioning Mandailing Natal as a global exemplar for value-based sexual education.

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