ASSESSING NURSING FACULTY READINESS AND CAPACITY TO TEACH SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR) THROUGH GAMIFICATION WHILE MAINTAINING CULTURAL APPROPRIATENESS IN DIR LOWER, KPK. A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATORY STUDY

Original Article

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ABSTRACT

Background: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) are essential to promote health equity and well-being. However, in some culturally conservative areas such as Dir Lower, KPK, teaching SRHR faces challenges due to social norms and taboos. Gamification, an innovative teaching strategy, has shown potential to engage nursing students and enhance learning outcomes in such areas. However, its implementation in culturally sensitive areas depends on the readiness and capacity of nursing faculty.

Objectives: This study aims to evaluate the readiness and capacity of nursing faculty to teach SRHR using gamified tools while maintaining cultural appropriateness. It seeks to recognize faculty perceptions, challenges, and support requirements to adopt gamification strategies more effectively.

Methods: A qualitative exploratory design was used, including 12 in-depth interviews with nursing faculty from a nursing institute in Dir Lower, KPK. The data was analyzed using content analysis to identify themes related to faculty readiness, barriers, and social and cultural considerations.

Results: Faculty demonstrated varied awareness levels regarding SRHR. While gamification was identified as an innovative approach for teaching. However, concerns regarding cultural sensitivity and feasibility were prevalent. Challenges such as limited technological resources, inadequate training, and potential negative perceptions and resistance from the community were highlighted. Participants highlighted the importance of aligning game-based content with cultural, social and religious norms to ensure acceptance.

Conclusions: Findings highlights the need for targeted faculty development programs, emphasizing on gamification principles and cultural competence. Tailored training initiatives and resource allocation can empower nursing faculty to teach SRHR in culturally sensitive settings, fostering improved health education outcomes.

Keywords: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Gamification, Faculty development programs, Social norms, Cultural sensitivity, Technological resources.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) is a fundamental human right and an integral component of comprehensive healthcare, significantly influencing overall health outcomes. Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) encompass a broad spectrum of essential elements, including an individual's right to life, autonomy, health, confidentiality, informed decision-making, literacy, and gender equality. Despite global advancements in SRHR, many individuals, particularly women and young people in Pakistan, continue to encounter systemic barriers that hinder their ability to exercise these rights. These obstacles stem from inadequate healthcare services, restrictive policies, societal norms, and delayed access to necessary care, resulting in severe health and social repercussions. Addressing these challenges is imperative to mitigate maternal mortality, reduce unplanned pregnancies, and combat gender-based discrimination, ultimately fostering improved community health and well-being (1). The global discourse on SRHR underwent a significant transformation with the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, which shifted the paradigm from population control to prioritizing individual reproductive rights. This landmark decision was further reinforced by the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which underscored the pivotal role of gender equality in ensuring comprehensive reproductive health rights (2). Aligning with these international commitments, SRHR is embedded within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality), emphasizing the critical need for equitable access to reproductive healthcare services (3).

Healthcare professionals, especially nurses, play a vital role in advancing SRHR through patient-centered care, counseling, and educational initiatives. Integrating SRHR education into nursing curricula is crucial to equipping future healthcare providers with the necessary competencies to address diverse reproductive health challenges while fostering cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in healthcare delivery. However, in Pakistan, particularly in conservative regions such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), discussing SRHR remains a societal taboo, further exacerbating barriers to effective education and awareness. Cultural and religious norms heavily influence perceptions of reproductive health, often restricting open dialogue and comprehensive education on the subject. Faculty members entrusted with teaching SRHR must navigate these sensitivities while ensuring that students receive evidence-based knowledge crucial for professional competency. The implementation of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in Pakistan requires careful adaptation to align with the prevailing cultural and religious ethos, as highlighted by UNESCO (4). To facilitate effective SRHR education, faculty development programs emphasizing cultural competency, effective communication, and pedagogical innovations are essential. Such initiatives can enhance educators' ability to convey sensitive content while fostering broader community acceptance. Additionally, strategic interventions involving community engagement and stakeholder consultations may mitigate resistance and promote the integration of SRHR education into mainstream healthcare training (5).

Innovative educational strategies such as gamification offer a promising approach to engaging students in SRHR topics while respecting cultural sensitivities. Gamification involves the incorporation of game-based elements such as competition, rewards, interactive storytelling, and progress tracking into educational frameworks to enhance learning experiences. In conservative regions where traditional pedagogical methods may face resistance, gamification presents an alternative strategy that fosters student engagement, improves knowledge retention, and facilitates behavioral change in a safe, interactive learning environment (6). Research has demonstrated that gamification can significantly enhance students' understanding of SRHR topics, particularly in settings where direct discussions on reproductive health may be met with reluctance. The integration of culturally adaptive gamified content into nursing education has been associated with increased student participation and improved comprehension of complex reproductive health concepts. Furthermore, gamification creates an inclusive learning environment that allows learners to explore SRHR topics through guided, collaborative experiences that align with local norms and values (7). Given the high maternal and child mortality rates in Pakistan, which remain alarmingly high at 186 deaths per 100,000 live births, there is an urgent need to enhance healthcare education strategies that promote SRHR awareness and service accessibility (8).

Despite its potential, implementing gamification in SRHR education presents several challenges. In resource-limited settings, particularly in developing and low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), access to necessary technological infrastructure may be constrained, limiting the feasibility of gamified learning platforms. Moreover, developing high-quality gamified tools requires substantial financial investment and technical expertise for both creation and ongoing maintenance. Institutional hesitancy to adopt gamification-based learning approaches often stems from limited familiarity with the method or skepticism regarding its effectiveness. Decision-makers and key stakeholders must be presented with strong, evidence-based studies demonstrating the efficacy of gamified SRHR education to garner support and secure necessary resources (9). Faculty preparedness is another critical factor in the successful implementation of gamification in SRHR education. Educators must possess a comprehensive understanding of gamification principles,

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including the integration of game mechanics such as rewards, challenges, and feedback loops into academic content. Structured faculty training programs emphasizing hands-on experience and continuous support mechanisms can enhance educators' confidence in utilizing gamification strategies. Studies have suggested that faculty members benefit significantly from step-by-step guidance on designing gamified learning activities, practical examples of successful implementations, and ongoing professional development opportunities to refine their expertise (10).

Given the existing gaps in research on gamification-based SRHR education in Pakistan, this study aims to explore its feasibility and effectiveness in conservative settings, specifically in District Dir (Lower), KPK. This investigation will provide a foundational basis for future research and contribute to the development of culturally sensitive, innovative educational strategies tailored to enhance reproductive health education in resource-constrained and socio-culturally restrictive environments. By assessing faculty readiness and evaluating student engagement outcomes, this study seeks to bridge existing knowledge gaps and inform policy recommendations for integrating gamification into SRHR education within nursing curricula.

METHODS

The study employed a qualitative descriptive exploratory design to gain an in-depth understanding of nursing faculty members' perceptions regarding the integration of gamification into sexual and reproductive health education. This approach was chosen to allow for a comprehensive exploration of experiences within the natural teaching environment. The study was conducted between November 2023 and January 2024 at a private nursing institute located in District Dir (Lower), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. The selected setting was relevant to the research objectives, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected the challenges and opportunities associated with innovative educational strategies in socio-culturally conservative environments.

Participants were recruited based on specific eligibility criteria to ensure the inclusion of experienced faculty members actively engaged in teaching reproductive health. Only nursing faculty with a minimum of three years of teaching experience were included in the study to ensure expertise in the subject matter. A total of 12 in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted, and data saturation was reached by the twelfth interview, as no new information emerged beyond this point. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, and the study's objectives were clearly explained to them. Ethical principles were strictly followed, ensuring voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any stage without consequences. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process, and culturally sensitive approaches were employed to create a safe and comfortable environment for discussing potentially sensitive topics.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent to ensure accuracy in data collection. The recordings were transcribed verbatim to maintain the authenticity of the participants' narratives. A content analysis approach was used for data interpretation, following a systematic coding process to identify recurring patterns and themes. Transcribed interviews were analyzed by grouping similar codes into categories, which were then consolidated into overarching themes to provide structured insights into faculty perceptions. This rigorous analytical method enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings, ensuring that the results accurately represented the perspectives of the study participants.

The study was conducted in compliance with ethical research guidelines, with formal approval obtained from the Ethical Review Committee of the respective institute. Ethical considerations were rigorously upheld, including safeguarding participant privacy and ensuring that all identifiable information was anonymized. Data were securely stored, and access was restricted to authorized researchers only. Measures were taken to minimize any potential discomfort associated with discussing SRHR-related topics, and appropriate support mechanisms were available if required. The study methodology was designed to align with ethical research principles while maintaining the integrity and credibility of the research process.

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RESULTS
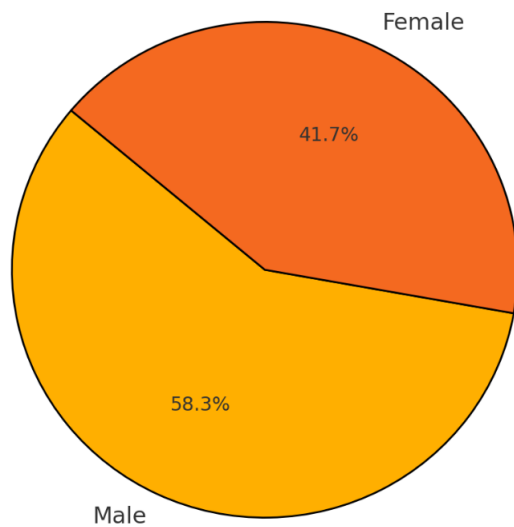
Gender Distribution of Participants

Figure 2 Gender Distribution of Participants
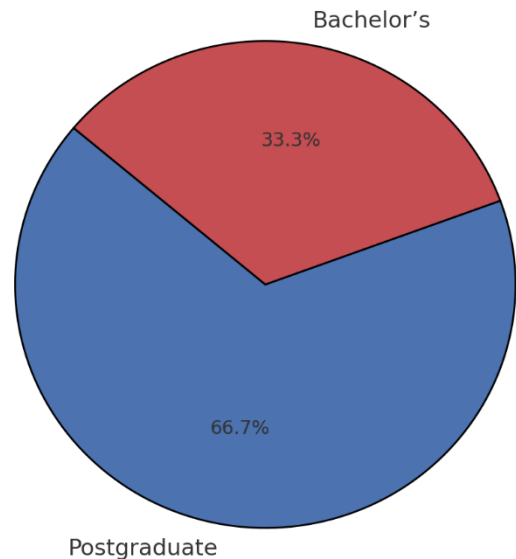
Education Level of Participants

Figure 1 Education Level of Participants

Theme 1: Readiness to Teach SRHR Using Gamification

Category 1: Faculty Awareness of SRHR
Participants showed varied levels of awareness and knowledge regarding SRHR. Some had a basic understanding of the context, while others lacked confidence in their knowledge of culture sensitive topics like contraception, gender equity, and sexual and reproductive rights.

"I am aware of basic concepts of SRHR, but I feel I need more clarity on teaching such sensitive topics in an acceptable way." (IDI 02)

Category 2: Perceptions of Gamification
Most faculty participants viewed gamification positively as an innovative teaching tool, recognizing its potential to engage students and make learning more effective. However, some of them expressed concerns about cultural resistance and feasibility in the rural areas.

"Using game-based teaching strategies can make the learning process more interesting, but we need to be very careful about keeping consideration of cultural and religious sensitivities." (IDI 05)

Category 3: Perceived Challenges in Implementation
Many faculty members discussed some potential barriers and challenges, including limitation in technological infrastructure, lack of proper training, and probable resistance from students or families due to cultural sensitivities.

"The main challenge is that we have insufficient resources like laptops, computers, and smart devices. In addition to this, we have issues in internet access and connectivity to implement and apply such advanced teaching methods." (IDI 08)

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Theme 2: Cultural Appropriateness in SRHR Education

Category 1: Sensitivity to Community Norms

Some participants highlighted that it is important to make gamified content align with the cultural norms and religious values to avoid criticism from the community.

"In the context of our community, anything related to sexual and reproductive health is considered as taboo, so we need to approach such topics very cautiously." (IDI 01)

Category 2: Strategies to Maintain Cultural Relevance

Some participant suggested that the integration of religious and cultural perceptions into SRHR education, such as presenting the concepts of SRHR with Islamic guidance, can increase acceptability among students, their families and the individuals of the community. This approach aligns sexual and reproductive health with local and cultural values, making the learning content more relevant and culturally appropriate.

"If we present SRHR concepts with Islamic guidance, it will be more acceptable to students and their families and the people of the community." (IDI 06)

Theme 3: Faculty Capacity Building for SRHR Gamification

Category 1: Training Needs

Some faculty members stated the need for organized training programs on SRHR and gamification techniques to promote their confidence and teaching efficacy.

"I need specific training on how to design and implement games for teaching SRHR. As I have knowledge about nursing subjects but no expertise of making such gamified tools as it need technical expertise and skills and without training, it will be difficult to implement." (IDI 04)

Category 2: Resource Support

Some of the participants highlighted the necessity for organizational support, including accessibility to gamification tools and strategies, curriculum resources, and continuous professional growth and development.

"The administration of the institute must make it sure that we have resources like computers, smart devices, good internet facility, and guidance on the development of gamified learning content." (IDI 07).

In Summary, The study explored faculty members' readiness and capacity to teach SRHR with the use of gamification, highlighting the need for increased awareness, training, and availability of resource. The participants perceived gamification strategy as an innovative method of teaching but they mentioned challenges and barriers such as cultural sensitivities, limitation in infrastructure, and potential negative perceptions and resistance from the local community. Maintaining cultural relevance emerged as a critical factor, with participants recommending the integration of religious and cultural values and norms into SRHR education.

DISCUSSION

The study findings emphasize the critical role of faculty readiness and institutional support in integrating gamification into sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education. While faculty members expressed willingness to adopt gamification, several challenges emerged, including the need for structured training, resource availability, and cultural adaptability. These findings align with previous research, highlighting that faculty training significantly improves the effectiveness of SRHR education, as demonstrated in a study conducted in Mexico, where structured training improved faculty competence and confidence in addressing reproductive health topics (10). Similarly, the current study reinforced that teaching SRHR in a culturally appropriate manner remains a priority, as reported by UNESCO, which emphasized that comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) should be tailored to align with the cultural and religious context of the region (11). Despite the growing global acceptance of gamification as an effective pedagogical tool, concerns about

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cultural resistance and feasibility in rural settings persist. The necessity for balancing educational innovation with cultural sensitivity has been widely acknowledged, particularly in conservative regions where reproductive health remains a stigmatized topic.

Gamification has demonstrated significant potential in enhancing SRHR education by increasing student motivation and engagement. A study conducted in Malaysia reported substantial improvements in student learning outcomes when gamification was integrated into reproductive health education (12). Faculty members in the current study recognized similar benefits but reported limitations such as lack of expertise in developing gamified content and insufficient institutional support. These findings align with research from Italy, where faculty members attempted to integrate gamification into their teaching practices but struggled due to limited technical proficiency and resource constraints (13). The implementation of gamification in SRHR education requires access to digital infrastructure, well-designed gamified tools, and faculty training in game-based learning methodologies. The present study identified these gaps as major obstacles, indicating that without proper technological support, gamification remains an underutilized strategy. Institutional commitment to faculty capacity-building programs and digital resource allocation is essential for overcoming these challenges.

Another significant barrier to gamification in SRHR education is the technological divide, particularly in low-resource settings. Rural areas often lack the necessary infrastructure, such as stable internet connectivity and access to smart devices, restricting the feasibility of technology-driven educational interventions. Similar challenges were reported in a study from the United Kingdom, where rural faculty members faced difficulties in implementing gamified learning due to technological limitations and limited awareness of digital tools (14). The present study further supports these findings, emphasizing that resource allocation plays a pivotal role in determining the effectiveness of gamified education. Without adequate investment in infrastructure, the adoption of gamification in nursing curricula will remain limited, preventing its full potential from being realized. Community engagement has also been identified as a crucial factor in addressing cultural resistance and increasing acceptance of SRHR education. Participants in this study suggested that integrating religious and cultural perspectives into SRHR content would foster greater community acceptance, a strategy that has been successfully implemented in other culturally conservative regions (15).

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. The research was conducted within a single geographical region, limiting the generalizability of its findings to other cultural and institutional contexts. Additionally, the study's qualitative design, while providing rich insights, does not quantify the impact of gamification on student learning outcomes. Future research should explore intervention-based studies to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of gamified SRHR education in diverse settings (16). Moreover, while this study highlights faculty perceptions, additional research involving student perspectives could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of gamified learning strategies in reproductive health education. Addressing these gaps will be essential in developing scalable, culturally adaptive educational frameworks that promote SRHR education across different regions (17).

The study's strengths lie in its novel exploration of faculty readiness to integrate gamification into SRHR education within a culturally conservative environment. It contributes to an under-researched area, providing foundational insights that can inform policy and curriculum development. However, ensuring the sustainability of gamification requires a multi-level approach involving training programs, technological support, curriculum modifications, and active stakeholder engagement. Structured faculty development programs, alongside continuous professional learning opportunities, have been shown to enhance teaching efficacy and student engagement in gamified settings (18). Additionally, strengthening institutional policies to prioritize gamified learning in nursing education can contribute to long-term improvements in SRHR literacy and awareness (19). The study findings reinforce the need for collaborative efforts between educational institutions, policymakers, and community leaders to facilitate the smooth integration of gamification into reproductive health education (20). By addressing faculty training needs, improving digital infrastructure, and fostering cultural acceptance, the potential of gamification in enhancing SRHR education can be fully realized, leading to improved reproductive health knowledge and outcomes among future healthcare professionals (21).

A recent comparative study conducted by Almeida et al. (2022) explored the effectiveness of gamified versus traditional teaching methods in sexual and reproductive health education across urban and rural nursing schools in Brazil. The study involved 320 nursing students, divided into two groups: one exposed to gamified learning modules and the other to conventional lecture-based teaching. Results revealed that students in the gamified group demonstrated significantly higher levels of engagement, knowledge retention, and confidence in addressing SRHR topics compared to the traditional group. Interestingly, the study also highlighted that the benefits of gamification were more pronounced in urban settings, where access to digital tools and stable internet connectivity was readily available. In contrast, rural students faced challenges such as limited access to technology and lower digital literacy, which hindered the effectiveness of gamified interventions. Despite these disparities, both groups reported that gamification made learning more interactive

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and enjoyable. The study underscores the importance of addressing infrastructural and cultural barriers to ensure equitable access to gamified SRHR education, particularly in resource-limited settings. These findings align with the current study's emphasis on the need for institutional support and technological investments to maximize the potential of gamification in nursing education (22).

CONCLUSION

The study provided valuable insights into faculty members' readiness and capacity to integrate gamification into sexual and reproductive health education, emphasizing the need for enhanced awareness, targeted training, and improved resource availability. While gamification was largely perceived as an innovative and engaging teaching strategy, several challenges, including cultural sensitivities, infrastructural limitations, and potential resistance from the local community, were identified as barriers to its successful implementation. The importance of maintaining cultural relevance was a recurring theme, with participants advocating for the integration of religious and cultural perspectives to enhance acceptance and effectiveness. By addressing these challenges, the study contributes to the growing discourse on innovative teaching methodologies in reproductive health education, particularly in culturally conservative settings. As the first study exploring the intersection of religious and cultural influences on the acceptance of gamification in SRHR education, it lays a crucial foundation for future research. However, its scope remains limited to a specific regional context, necessitating further investigations across diverse cultural and institutional settings to develop more comprehensive and adaptable educational frameworks. Strengthening faculty capacity, ensuring institutional support, and fostering community engagement are essential steps toward successfully incorporating gamification into SRHR education, ultimately improving reproductive health literacy and accessibility.

Author Contribution

Author	Contribution
Jalal Khan*	Substantial Contribution to study design, analysis, acquisition of Data Manuscript Writing Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Tazeen Saeed Ali	Substantial Contribution to study design, acquisition and interpretation of Data Critical Review and Manuscript Writing Has given Final Approval of the version to be published

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