INCLUSION OF SEX EDUCATION INTO SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN PORT HARCOURT, RIVERS STATE – PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Nyege C. Nnokam, Ph.D and Aboroh Dominica

Abstract

Sex education involves providing children with knowledge and concept that will enable them make informed and responsible decisions about sexual behaviours at all stages of their life. Hence it is imperative for the inclusion of sex education into secondary school curriculum. The major thrust of the paper is on inclusion of Sex Education into secondary school curriculum in Port Harcourt, Rivers State – Problems and Prospects. Four research questions were postulated to guide the study. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted to draw a sample of 300 students from 4 secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The simple percentage method was employed for obtaining and interpreting the information. The study proved that sex education is a welcome development with favourable prospect and positive impact on the student and youths of our country. Therefore it was recommended that sex education should be included in the school curriculum in all secondary schools and the establishment of school-based health services to provide adolescents in the schools with more technical sexual and reproductive health information based on the assumption that the knowledge acquired will lead to behavioural change amongst others.

Keywords: Sex Education, School Curriculum, Sexuality Education

Sex education is a subject on which many schools and most parents remain silent about and likened to the proverbial ostrich that sticks her head into the sand in the desert pretending or thinking that all is well. Religion and cultural taboos exert a powerful influence not only on sexual attitude and behaviours, but even on the discourse of sexuality. Parents and teachers alike lack the necessary knowledge about sex education while children are misinformed or lack accurate knowledge. Thus evidence of sexual maladjustments and sex related crimes abound in every facets of the society. Traditionally, children and adolescents are not given timely and useful information on sexual matters as such issues are considered a taboo. Information about sex is left to a child’s parent who most times put off such knowledge or information until just before the child discovers same for him/herself at the time of marriage. Most information on sexual matters is obtained informally from friends, house-helps, family drivers, gardeners and the media and many of this information is of doubtful value, deficient and ill-intentioned with aim of taking undue advantage of the person being informed. This deficiency is evident in the increasing incidences of teenage unwanted pregnancies, high and rising rate of abortions, HIV infections and early marriages. As part of the nation’s concerted effort to abate these societal ills with its long-term consequences, programme of sex education was instituted.

Sex education is a major component of comprehensive health education, the goal of which is to help children and adolescents become healthy adults with responsible health behaviour. A child should be brought up in a curriculum that he/she gets accurate information about sex from teachers, parents as well as from the society. It is painful that children and adolescents do not receive sex education in school or at home but from unreliable sources and ill-informed classmates hence leading to massive amount of misinformation. Including sexuality education in the school curriculum would make the children and adolescents to obtain right information at the right time and from the right source. School-based sexuality education is one of the most important and proven ways to help young people improve their reproductive health. Effective school-based sex education can also be an important way to enhance young people’s knowledge attitude and behaviour.

In Nigeria, schools play a key role in imparting information on health and human relations. Although too many Nigerian children still lack access to secondary or even primary education for those young people who do attend school. The school setting provides an important avenue to transmit information and skill that can protect them against risky behaviour. Thus, this study will set
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standards and examine the problems and prospects of introducing sex education into secondary schools curriculum in Nigeria.

Importance of Sex Education in Secondary Schools Curriculum

Studies have shown that adolescents in Nigeria have poor knowledge of reproductive health issues and that there was a need to provide them with correct broad-based information on reproductive health as part of a naturally approved curriculum. Many parents lack the necessary knowledge about sex education and some of their children too lack accurate knowledge, while others are misinformed. Thus, evidence of sexual maladjustment and sex-related crimes abound in the society. Umoh (1986) contends that most parents and guardians in most parts of the world, and indeed in Nigeria, often react negatively and sometimes violently to the idea of introducing sex education in the secondary school curriculum. According to him, the negative reactions cut across cultures, tribes, race and religion. While emphasizing the importance of sex education in the secondary schools curriculum, Emenike (1981) is of the opinion that the post primary school age which ranges between twelve and seventeen years of the growing child is not only the most impressionable but the most inquisitive period. Thus, sex education at this level becomes even more imperative and fundamental.

Statement of Problem

The internet age has brought with it rapid development in all facets of life without a corresponding emphasis on the relevance of sex education. A lot of social ills in the society can be traced to rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, and education. Parental influence is fading away very fast and urban life expanding; hence a lot of unwholesome conditions abound in our society. This is of concern to schools hence the need for sex education in schools.

Human sexuality is concerned with the ways people experience and expresses themselves as sexual beings. A large body of literature on sexuality has focused discussions on, the physiological and pathological aspect of sexual behaviours in adults whilst the subject matter as concern children is not usually given much in-depth discussion.

Sexuality is not only biological; it is also sociological and philosophical spanning across cultural, political, moral ethical and religious considerations. A recent debate by UNESCO (2009) remark inter alia; “The Challenge for sexuality education is to reach young people before they become sexually active, whether this is through choice, necessity, coercion or exploitation. “It is important therefore that the needs of the most vulnerable members of the society are taken into consideration”. Nigeria, being a full member of the global village is not isolated from current trends and happenings in other parts of the world. Thus, it experiences the full impact of the influence of foreign popular culture being imbibed and accepted as the norm by her youths. Nigerian youths now have access to information which was hitherto unavailable to their parents when they were youths. They access this information through the web and other media sources without supervision and monitoring.

Recent studies by World Health Organization (2002) have revealed that most African Youths, Nigeria inclusive now experience sex at an earlier age than their parents did. The decline in age sexual experience among adolescents contrary to the accepted moral and cultural values portends a dangerous trend which affects the educational system and the society at large. The onus is on the school as an important institution of the society vested with the all important role of training and preparing youths to be useful members of the society. It therefore makes a lot of sense to say that the teens of this age cannot be properly raised with out-dated traditions and beliefs about sex. This study is aimed at emphasising the relevance of this otherwise relegated issue of sex education in our time.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to examine the problems and prospects of including sex education into secondary schools curriculum in Nigeria. The specific objectives amongst others are:

1. To ascertain the purpose of including sex education into secondary school curriculum.
2. To identify the problems and implications of including sex education in the afore-mentioned schools.
3. To access the prospects that accrues from the inclusion of sex education in the secondary school curriculum.
4. To highlight the impact of sex education on the economy and social life of the nation’s youths.
Inclusion of Sex Education into Secondary School Curriculum in Port Harcourt, Rivers State – Problems and Prospects

Research Questions
Four research questions were postulated to guide the study.

1. What is the purpose of including sex education into secondary schools curriculum?
2. What are the implications or problems of the inclusion of sex education in our secondary schools?
3. What are the prospects of inclusion of sex education in our secondary schools curriculum?
4. What impact will the inclusion of sex education have on the socio-cultural behaviour of the Nigeria youths in the long-run?

Methodology

Research Design
The causal research design is adopted for this study to enable the researcher investigate the relationship between the independent variable-problems and prospects of sexuality education and the dependent variable-the student.

Population
The population of the study comprises of students from all Government Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Sample and Sampling Techniques
Stratified random sampling was adopted as the sampling technique. The sample was made up of 300 students drawn from the selected secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Rivers State as follows: Community Secondary School, Amadi-Ama (90), Community Secondary School, Orowurukwo (60), Government Secondary School, Elekahia (80), and Government Secondary School, Borikiri (70).

Instrumentation
The instrument for the study consisted of a structured questionnaire tagged: 'Problems and Prospects of including sex education into secondary schools'. The questionnaire consisted of structured questions on a modified four point Likert type of rating scale ranging from one to four as follows: Strongly agreed (SA) = 4 points, Agree (A) = 3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 points and Strongly disagreed (SD) = 1 point respectively.

Method of Data Analysis
The analysis of the data was viewed from the degree of agreement and disagreement to the research questions viz (SA) Strongly Agree; (A) Agree; (D) Disagree and (SD) Strongly Disagree. In analyzing the research questions for this study, an average percentage of the number of respondents in respect to each question was adopted to highlight the trend of the study. Hence, a total of the percentage of the number of responses for each question was summed up and divided by the number of the respondents to get the actual percentage of each research question.

Results
The data and results of each of the research questions are presented on the following tables.

Research Questions 1:
What is the purpose of including sex education into secondary schools curriculum?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Sex education in needed in schools since parental influence</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.</td>
<td>Sex education provide youths with adequate information about sex</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii.</td>
<td>Teenagers of today need adequate preparation to be adults of tomorrow</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv.</td>
<td>Sex education provides understanding of the need for moral</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Interpretation of Result – A

It can be seen that from the five questions posed to ascertain the purpose(s) of the inclusion of sex education into secondary school curriculum, the following results were obtained:

Item Ai. SA (64%) + A (29%) = 93% supports the fact that failure of parental guidance has made the inclusion of sex education very relevant. Item Aii – SA (62%) + A (32%) = 94% means that youths are better informed about sexuality with the inclusion of sex education. Item Aiii – SA (89%) + A (11%) = 100% means that youths of today will be better adults tomorrow if introduced to sex education. Item Aiv – SA (46%) + A (36%) = 82% means that one of the purpose of introducing sex education is to enhance moral value and self-worth among our youths.

Research Questions 2:

Table B: The result here highlights the various problems associated with the inclusion of sex education. Item Bi – 68% positive response i.e. SA (29%) + A (39%) confirms that socio-cultural belief is a problem facing the inclusion of sex education. Item Bii – 70% of the respondents is SA (43%) + A (27%) agrees that religious inclination is also a problem affecting the inclusion of sex education. Item Biii – on the problematic issue of the most appropriate place to discuss sex education, respondents with 82% = D (32%) + SD (50%) suggested that our schools, homes and communities should be avenue to discuss sex education. Item Biv – the problem of socio-economic status as it affects sex education was confirm with 86% =SA (32%) + A (54%) answer from respondents, meaning that sexuality is a function of socio-economic status. Item Bv – 89% = D (27%) + SD (62%) of the respondents resolves the problem of who plays the important role in the issue of sex education – parents and religious organization only.

Interpretation of Result – B

Table C: The spread of sexually transmitted disease can be controlled through teaching sex education in secondary schools (57%) and sex education will increase the awareness of sexuality and then lead to increase in cases of rape and assault (16%). There will be less cases of fatherless children, teenager parents and school drop-out resulting from unwanted pregnancies (45%).

Research Questions 3:

Prospects of the inclusion of Sex education in secondary schools curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C i.</td>
<td>The spread of sexually transmitted disease can be controlled through teaching sex education in secondary schools</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sex education will increase the awareness of sexuality and then lead to increase in cases of rape and assault.</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There will be less cases of fatherless children, teenager parents and school drop-out resulting from unwanted pregnancies</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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iv. Personal values in the areas of virginity, responsible parenthood and respect for others will be enhanced

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal values</td>
<td>105 123</td>
<td>38 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in the areas of virginity, responsible parenthood and respect for others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>will be enhanced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>38% 44% 13% 5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interpretation of Result – C**

Table C; responses to these sets of questions highlights the prospects of the inclusion of sex education in our schools, item Ci – Sex education taught in schools will control the spread of sexually transmitted diseases based on better informed youth population as revealed in the students response of 86% - SA (57%) + A (29%). Item Cii – against the belief that the inclusion of sex education will increase cases of assault and rape, 66% of the respondents SD (34%) + D (32%) agreed that sex education will reduce the incidents of assault and rape. Item Ciii – the affirmative response of 82% = SA (45%) A (37%) confirms that the inclusion of sex education will reduce cases of teenage parenthood and unwanted pregnancies. Item Civ – The response rate of 82% - SA (38%) + A (44%) confirms the fact that personal values in the areas of virginity, responsible parenthood and unwanted pregnancies will be enhanced.

**Research question 4:**
Impact of the inclusion of Sex Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Sexuality education will help young people make healthy choices in life</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>3$</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.</td>
<td>Sex education will impact the Nigeria economy in the area of healthy/stable youth work-force and reduction in the government medical expenses (HIV drugs)</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii.</td>
<td>Sex education enhances self-worth and individual’s self-esteem</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interpretation of Result – D**

Item Di – The affirmative response of 86% = SA (43%) + A (43%) confirms that the inclusion of sex education will help Nigeria youths make healthy choices in life. Item Dii – 82% of respondents SA (50%) + A (32%) also confirm the fact that the Nigerian economy will improve significantly in the area of availability of a healthy/stable youth work-force and that there will also be a reduction in government medical expenses related to the provision of free HIV drugs and other STD – related diseases. Item Diii – 82% of our respondents SA (43%) + A (39%) strongly believes that self-worth and individual self-esteem is enhance by sex education.

**Discussion of findings**

The findings of the study revealed that the inclusion of sex education in our schools is a conscious effort to ‘catch them young’ by the provision of adequate information to the students on sex related issues. Although students applaud the idea of including sex education into our schools, religious and socio-cultural beliefs of the people as well as the ‘taboo’ placed on the discussion of such topics pose a serious problem. Despite these findings, there is a belief that the prospects attributable to the inclusion of sex education will be a decrease in sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancy and overall improvement in the Nigerian healthy/stable youth work-force. This finding agrees with Adepoju (2005) who postulated that the introduction of sexuality education will acquaint the youths with factual and accurate sexual information about the various dimensions of sexual knowledge that will enable them understand and clarify their personal values.

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Conclusion

It is apparent from the research findings that the inclusion of sex education is a welcomed development with favourable prospects and positive impact on the students and eventually youths of our country, Nigeria. These notwithstanding, there are problems hindering the effective and proper inclusion of sex education into our schools, but the benefits accruable from so doing far outweigh the problems and therefore the inclusion of sex education in our schools should be encouraged.

Recommendations

In the light of the discussion in this paper the following recommendations are made.

1. Nigeria government at all levels should support this lofty idea as they too stand to gain a lot there from. This can be done by way of adequate funding to enable the schools acquire skilled teaching staff that will competently deliver on this programme.
2. Non-profit making bodies and NGOs should be encouraged to support the course sex education in our schools by donating training facilities and other teaching aids that will create an enabling environment for the teaching of sex education to thrive.
3. It is also recommended that our legislators should consider passing a law on this all important matters to bring down the seriousness of the issue.
4. The inclusion of sex education in the school curriculum in all secondary schools and the establishment of school-based health services to provide adolescents in the schools with more technical sexual and reproductive health information based on the assumption that the knowledge acquired will lead to behavioural change in our youths.
5. A more comprehensive sex education programme should be emphasized to make up for parental short-comings and dereliction of duties with respect to instilling the early-life discipline and principles in this area.

References


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World Health Organisation (2002). Sexual Health; question and answer