

SEXUALITY EDUCATION: A NECESSARY PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE FOR NIGERIAN YOUTHS

Dr. Muhammad Mann Shaaba

Abstract

This paper discusses philosophy of life in relation to sexuality education. In this age when sexual promiscuity, HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, complicated teenage pregnancy and all types of negative sexual issues have become topical, the paper opined that comprehensive sexuality education should be an integral part of youths philosophy of life in Nigeria. The paper explained sexuality education as completely different from teaching youths how to sex as erroneously believed by some parents. Rather, it is a planned process of education that make learners acquire information and knowledge about human sexually. It help learners to develop positive attitudes, values and skills on how to relate to people rationally and responsibly. The paper suggested among other things that teachers should acquire knowledge of sexuality education and should treat learner's affective domain more seriously. Parents should be positive about knowledge of sexuality and regard it as an important ingredient in youth's philosophy of life.

Introduction

Ordinary to many minds including even those who are elites, a mentioning of the world philosophy could convey the picture of an abstract subject matter that may not be relevant or important to practical life. This position may be ignorant of, or may have set aside the fact that philosophy was the beginning of knowledge and the beginning of formal wisdom. In the classical Greek thought, philosophy meant wisdom and wisdom was equivalent to knowledge, hence Greek philosophers like Aristotle were scientists as well as philosophers. In addition, Greek philosophers like Socrates focused on problems and conduct of human life. Eventually, "wisdom was regarded as knowledge for the conduct of life and philosophy was valued as a way of life, as providing a means of enabling the individual to live a best kind of life" (Curtis, 1968:5).

This classical view of philosophy as a way of life is relevant today in the 21st century as it was in the classical Greek days. All past and present leaders, all societies past and present and all human beings, past and present, consciously or unconsciously, are guided by certain principles which can be qualified as philosophy of life. These principles either well or poorly articulated guide people on how to make friends and who to make their friends; such principles guide them on how to plan their lives and implement such plans. People in this context cut across adults and adolescents.

In this age, when adolescent sex seems to have become a way of life, and given the negative impact of HIV/AIDS and the frequency of teenage complicated pregnancy, there is need for education on sexuality matters. Unfortunately, sexuality education is a relatively new area in Nigerian education. In view of the above, this paper examines the subject matter of sexuality education and relates it to the general idea of philosophy of life. This is with the over all aim of making youths and even parents appreciate the need to make sexuality education part of their philosophy of life so as to enhance responsible and rational living.

What is Sexuality Education?

Since many adults have never experienced formal education about sexuality, they view the subject matter of sexuality education in a narrow, often distorted way. Some fear it means teaching youngsters "how to have sex". But, this is not true because, one way or the other, every youth do figure out how to sex whether they are formally taught or not. In contrast to the fear, sexuality education is concerned with a much broader approach to sex. It addresses all aspects of becoming and/or being a sexual gendered person including biological, psychological and social perspectives.

Sexuality, according to Busari and (Ojo (2007) is not synonymous with sexual intercourse; it is not only about whether we have organs or not and it is not the sum total of erotic lives. It is the energy that motivates us to find love, contact, warmth and intimacy. Sexuality influences our thoughts, feelings, actions, interaction and thereby our mental and physical health.

From a comprehensive point of view, sexuality education, according to Hedgepeth and Helmich (1996)

addresses everything from growth and development to self-esteem, to gender roles and stereotypes, to understanding the media, to resisting peer pressure, to being a sexual person throughout life, to prevention and treatment of sexual problems, to knowing the differences between love and lust, to communication and other relationship skills and parenting (p2).

Sexuality education can further be differentiated from “Prophylactic sex education” which concentrates mainly on the prevention of undesirable sexual consequences such as sexually transmitted diseases, sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancy sexual violence and harassment. Much as knowledge of the negative aspects of sex is important in comprehensive sexuality education, limiting discussion to such “dangers of sex” without addressing the pleasure and joys of sex will amount to promoting a “sex – negative” attitude to human sexuality (Hedgepeth and Heimich, 1996).

According to the Action Health Incorporated (2003), Comprehensive Sexuality Education is a planned process of education that fosters the acquisition of factual information about human sexuality; fosters the formation of positive attitude, beliefs and values on human sexuality, as well as the development of skills to cope with the biological, psychological, socio-cultural and spiritual aspects of human sexuality. The ultimate aim at sexuality education is to make people sexually healthy. People who are sexually healthy can be identified with the following qualities: They appreciate their bodies; interact with both genders in appropriate and respectful ways; express love and intimacy in appropriate ways; avoid exploitative relationships; recognize their own values and show respect for people with different values, enjoying sexual feelings without necessarily acting on them and communicate effectively with family, friends and partners. Other identifiable qualities, according to Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States of America in Hedgepeth and Helmich (1996) include: Ability and willingness to talk with a partner about sexual activity before it occurs, including sexual limits contraceptive and prophylactic use; practice prevention of ill health, such as regular checkups, breast or testicular self examination understand the impact of media and peer messages on thoughts, feelings values and sexuality-related behaviours; and seek information about sexuality as needed (Hedgepeth and Helmich, 1996).

Thus, sexuality education is all about acquisition of factual information and knowledge about sexuality matters and general life skills about human interaction and survival; factual information and knowledge that will help individuals grow and develop appropriately and relate to both genders intelligently, responsibly and respectfully. Sexually education involves developing positive attitudes and skills in people so that they can willingly and happily avoid the dangers of sex if they are sexually active without becoming promiscuous. It involves fostering right sexuality thoughts, feelings and behaviours at appropriate times in life. Sexuality education involves making people consistently practice the habit of maintaining good health with emphasis on preventing the sex organs from becoming infected by any disease. Quite importantly, it includes knowledge and skills of effective parenting, effective pre and post marital relationship all aimed at living a happy, safe and fulfilling life.

Given the above explanation of sexuality education, how can it be related to philosophy and by extension, to philosophy of life. This question will be answered within the context identifying the philosophical elements in sexuality education.

What is philosophical about sexuality education?

It is important to point out the peculiar nature of philosophy as an academic discipline so as to answer the question effectively. According to Dewey (1944) Philosophy can never be defined in terms of subject matter. It is a discipline without a water – tight frontier, hence, we have philosophies of: science mathematics, religion, law, politics etc. Accordingly, “Philosophy is not in the ordinary sense of the phrase, a body of knowledge but rather an activity of criticisms and clarification” (O. Conor in Enoh, 1995: 8). This is why a philosopher is not necessary judged by the body of philosophical views or positions that he or she has amassed over time but he or she is judged more by his critical attitude to subjects and issues. In other words, philosophy is more of an attitude than matter of content (Enoh, 1995).

Another relevant peculiarity of philosophy is its concern with value under one of its branches – axiology. The importance of values to human being is aptly captured by Curtis I(1968) thus:

It is a fact of experience that human beings are continually valuing things and activities throughout the whole of their lives. One might almost say that the relation between living and valuing is so intimate that as long as we live, we value, and when we cease to value. We cease to live (p.23 – 24).

Akinpelu (2005) agreed when he referred to man as a valuing animal (p. 185). Values are not only closely related to human life, but are also closely related to education. Thus, in whatever perspective one may talk of education, the value dimension is very much near the surface, if not the flesh and bone of the activities (Akinpelu, 2005 188).

The importance of critical attitude in philosophy and its concern for value and by extension, education constitute the basis by which sexuality education can be regarded as philosophical. Sexuality education implies developing critical attitudes of choice making in defining oneself and relating to others. For example, in putting sexuality education into practice, an individual planning to marry may ask him or herself. What is good in my proposed partner? Are we compatible in our life styles? Why do I prefer him or her to the other person? Will he or she respect my feelings? Is he or she tolerant to opposing views? Does he or she believe in discussing problems in mutually acceptable ways? Answering these pre choice making questions involves a lot of critical (philosophical) attitude to life. In other words, putting sexuality education into practice is nothing but a philosophical activity of critical approach to issues.

Furthermore, sexuality education is a form of education and like all forms of education, it is closely connected with values. Sexually educated individuals will always prefer to behave in particular ways (i.e value particular ways) than others. They will always value their bodies, value their healthy wellbeing and do same for others, value sex positively and as such, avoid its dangers, 'value negotiation over imposition, value assertiveness in a rational manner over dogmatic submission to please a partner. It can therefore be stated that sexuality education is philosophical not only in content but quite importantly, in attitudinal practice.

Thus, sexuality education on the basis of all the above can be qualified as an important source of ones' world view and by implication, one's philosophy of life. World view, according to Ogunwole (2004) refers to the fundamental human beliefs concerning nature and personal social life, beliefs that play an integrating, orientational role in consciousness, behaviour, creativity and peoples combined activity. A person's world view constitutes a take – off point for his philosophy of life which ultimately, enables individuals to live the best kind of life. A person's philosophy of life defines his essence set his values and projects him to others in addition to self projection.

The Need for Sexuality Education in Youth's Philosophy of Life

Adolescence is a time when young people are learning a great deal about themselves and adjusting to rapid changes in their bodies J.J. Reauseau, an eighteenth century naturalist philosopher described the adolescent period (15 – 25 years) as the crown and coping stone of education because it is the period of second birth of human beings (Shaaba, 2003); so called period of second birth because of the new passions and changes taking place within them. As adolescents mature, some feel confused about what they are supposed to do In a variety of situations such as making sense of evolving relationships with family and peers; coping with new sexual feelings, and trying to assess conflicting message about who they are and what is expected of them. A philosophy of life derived from sexuality education can provide necessary information and assurance of what is happening to ones body and what to do to live a good youthful life.

Youth need balanced information about sexuality matters, instead of being informed only about the health risks and potential negative consequences associated with sexual activities; youths need knowledge and information about the positive aspects of sex. Since human sexuality is a life-long process, opportunities need to be provided for youths to consider all aspects of sexuality, to ask questions and form attitudes and values about identity, relationships and intimacy. A philosophy of life based on comprehensive sexuality education will provide youths with balanced, informed and appropriate frame of mind that can enable them live a worthy and responsible life.

Despite the above benefit derivable from sexuality education, many Nigeria homes still protect adolescents from receiving education on sexual matters either because of outright ignorance of its benefits or religious – traditional constraints. For example, it is falsely believed that ignorance about sexuality would encourage chastity. But studies of the sexual and reproductive health behaviour of Nigerian youths confirm that 25% to 50% of the youths disclosed that they were already sexually active even though they have no formal knowledge of sexuality education. Also about 25% of young girls questioned stated that their first experience of sexual intercourse was through rape or one type of force or the other (Action Health Incorporated, 2003). Furthermore, the 1999 National Conference on Adolescent Reproductive Health in Nigeria revealed that:

In Nigeria... there is early initiation of sexual activities; there is high incidence of teenage pregnancy, and that teenagers account for 80% of unsafe abortion complications treated in hospitals... documented evidence shows that there has been a break down of other socio-cultural norms, values and practice that used to serve as checks to premarital sexual activity (Action Health Incorporated, (2003: 5).

More so, the Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Nigeria according to Action Health Incorporated (2003) noted that many more Nigerians are beginning to realize that if the problems unwanted teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STI/HIV/AIDS) and sexual abuse are to be effectively addressed, it is quite important that all people develop accurate, rational and responsible attitudes towards sexuality matters.

In view of the above, Nigeria youths need a philosophy of life that includes sexuality education; sexuality education that is not restricted to penetrative sex or use of contraceptive. It should be a comprehensive sexuality education that will foster rational mental attitude that help them explore other topics that influence their development about body image, gender roles and ways of expressing love and intimacy among themselves; a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs and values about identity, relationships and intimacy.

Implications of Youths' Philosophy of Life

A philosophy of life that covers sexuality matters which has been found to be necessary for Nigerian youths has a number of implications for parents and teachers. These include the following.

1. Teachers should have a broad view of philosophy of life as the totality of principles and views guiding a person's attitude and behaviour in life, not as an academic discipline meant only for academic philosophers;
2. In view of the above, teachers should conceive sexuality education as an important ingredient of a youth's philosophy of life.
3. Teachers at all levels of education should widen their horizon and scope of knowledge to include comprehensive sexuality education so that they can effectively participate in helping youths to develop a philosophy of life that include sexuality matters.
4. Teachers should treat with more seriousness the affective domain of learning which can involve using whatever subjects they teach to enhance learners philosophy of life, especially on sexuality matters.
5. In line with the affective domain of learning, teachers should monitor the type of friends that students keep so as to prevent negative peer influence, especially on sexuality matters.
6. On the part of parents, they should not conceive sexuality education as an abomination, but as normal part of life education which is important for youths development.
7. Parents should consider sexuality education as part of their duties to their children especially when they reach adolescent (youth) stage of development.
8. Parent should conceive sexuality education from a comprehensive point of view in which youths are taught not only negative and positive aspects of sex, but they are taught life skills of how to grow, develop and relate to people responsibility and rationally.
9. Since peers and friends are important sources of information about sexuality to youths, parents should as much as possible, prevent their children from keeping bad companies that may influence their philosophy of life, especially on sexuality matters negatively, and

10. Parents should closely monitor the relationship between their family members and other families/surrounding neighbours so as to prevent undesirable happenings like rape which in many cases, are commonly perpetuated by neighbours and family friends that are supposed to be trusted.

Conclusion

This paper has stated that youths in Nigeria should not be insulated from acquiring knowledge and facts about sexuality matters because such ignorance does not in any significant way bring about chastity. One way or the other, they always get to know about sexuality independent of the parents. In order to save the youths from unwanted pregnancy, rape and all the negative aspect of sexuality while at the same time, enable them enjoy the positive aspect at the right time, parents and teachers need to be deliberately involved in comprehensive sexuality education of their youthful children and students. This will go a long way to make the youths develop a philosophy of the life that will make them relate to both sexes responsibly and rationally.

References

- Action Health Incorporated (2003), *Comprehensive sexuality education trainers resource manual*. Lagos Action Health Inc.
- Akinpelu, J. A. (2005). *Themes in philosophy of education for teachers*. Ibadan:
- Busari, A. O. & Ojo, R. A. (2007). Social transformation of people with special needs through sexuality and reproductive health education, in I. A Nwazuo, E. A Oke diran and O. A Moronkolo (Eds) *Education for social transformation*. Ibadan: Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan.
- Curtis, S. J. (1968). *Introduction to the philosophy of education*. Foxton near Cambridge: University Tutorial press.
- Dewey, J. (1944) *Democracy and education*. New York the Macmillan Company.
- Enoh, A. O. (1995). *Invitation to philosophy of education*. Jos: Midland Press.
- Hedgepeth, V. & Helmich, J. (1996) *Teaching about sexuality and HIV principles and methods for effective education*. New York: University Press.
- Ogundowole, E. K. (2004) *Philosophy and society*. Lagos: Correct Counsels Ltd.
- Shaaba M. M. (2003). *Introduction to philosophy of Education*: Ilorin Adufe Press.