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Enhancing Sustainable National Development through Positive Perception of the Aged by the Youths

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Abstract

This paper investigated the perception of the aged by the youths in Cross River State, Nigeria. To guide the conduct of the study, one null hypothesis was formulated for testing. The study employed the survey design technique of investigation. A sample size of 1116 SS2 students drawn from a population of 10,591 students in the 232 public secondary schools in the 3 education zone of Cross River State using both stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The instrument used for data collection was a 10-items researchers' made questionnaire called Youths' Perception of the Aged Questionnaire (YPAQ). The statistical tool used for data analysis in the study was the population t-test. The hypothesis was tested at 05 level of significance. The result of data analysis showed that youths in Cross River State perceived the aged positively. Based on this revelation, recommendations were made, one of which is the encouragement and promotion of free communication system between the aged and the youths.

Ageing is a process in human development and growing old is welcomed by many people. No wise man ever wished to remain young for ever, and according to a

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20th century Italian poet, Salvatore Quasirnodo, “each of us stands alone at the heart of the earth, pierced through by a ray of sunshine: And suddenly it is evening”, (Scott, 2008). This affirms that aging is inevitable in human lives. There is hardly any society in the world without the aged. Some cultures (Japan, South-East Nigeria, for instance) view aging positively, where as, in some other cultures, aging is seen ambivalently or even negatively, (Nweze, 2007). In Africa, the aged are seen from a purely anthropological perspective. They are respected, served, and their opinions are highly rated in the society, (Kolo, 2007). The aged in the African culture are viewed as an embodiment of wisdom and valuable experience, hence they serve as advisers to the political class and younger ones in the society. The aged are those individuals according to Kolo (2007) who are 65 years and above. He averred that all human societies recognize their role in social relations and economic development. However, the perception of the aged apart from being subjected to the wave of culture change is not the same in all human cultures, (Ajala, 2006). Studies indicate that ageism is not restricted to any single society and the stereo type spans across national and cultural boundaries. Societies all over the world display the display attitudes towards the aged. While some societies, Hong Kong for instance, views aging with open-mindedness and tolerance, (Hawkins, 2005) others see them as repositories of experience, memories, authority, and wisdom for societal development, (Robertson, 1976; Kolo, 2007). Yet some exclude them from the scheme of things.

Scott, Minichiello, and Browning (2000) were of the opinion that youths have a limited knowledge about the aged. Perception of the aged by the youths therefore is an important area of concern if Nigeria must realize her national development goals. Although everyone is familiar with aging, defining it is not without its complexities. Aging can have a positive connotation as in “aging wine”. In the context of senescence and unless otherwise noted, the term aging refers to the biological process of growing older in a deleterious sense, what some authors call senescence. Demographically, aging has been defined as the series of changes that render human beings progressively more likely to die, (Medawar, 1952 in Magalhaes, 2002). However, this paper refers to aging as growing old, a period when one is fifty-five (55) years and above. Growing old is an unavoidable process in people’s life span. The perception of the aged by the younger generation has over time, changed from positive to negative. The aged are sometimes no more regarded as the repositories of information and wisdom as it was in the past. Rather, they are viewed as people who have nothing to offer. They are rendered powerless, alienated and not-respected as before, thereby losing authority, (Sijusade, 1991). The negative perception seems to portray them as having outlived their usefulness in the society when in the real sense, they still remain information or knowledge bank. It is most worrisome to find the younger generation calling the older adults names such as “Old School”, “Baba” “Okongwu” and “Mama”, (Nweze, 2007; Kolo, 2007). These names according to Nweze and Kolo, have some negative

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connotation that simply remind the person that he or she is old or perhaps, good for nothing. The aged who have served this country in various capacities during their prime years are left after retirement to sleep on the streets, die in queues, and become aged street beggars because some greedy youths do not want to release their terminal benefits, (Kolo, 2007). It is also very unfortunate that it is when the aged are declining in all sensual functions that the society wants to arrange an educational system where they will learn skills and techniques for post-retirement career. Kolo lamented that sometimes, these aged citizens come out of these skills acquisition programmes without achieving anything. Their retirement benefits are not paid to them on time and they are not even empowered to start off any small business of their own. At this point, they lose their respect to the youths because they do not have anything to offer financially in a society engulfed by materialism. Using a sample of 314 secondary school students in Northern Cross River State, Basse (2006) carried out a study on adolescents' perception of the aged and their attitude towards them. The study revealed that the relationship between youths' perception of the aged and their attitude towards them was significant and positive. Aged persons in the past were viewed in the real sense positively and regarded as repertoires of information and wisdom to be consulted in sorting out problems in the society, (Ukpong, 2004; Kolo, 2007). Today, older people are perceived as behaving like children and sometimes, described as looking sickly, ugly and parasitic, (Choi, 1993; Papalia and Olds, 1995). Others see them as being incapable to think clearly, learn new things, enjoy sex, contribute effectively in societal development, nor hold responsible positions in offices. One of the characteristics ascribed to the aged is forgetfulness, (Ukpong, 2000, 2004; Denga and Udoh, 2002; Levy and Lenger, 1994). However, Nweze (2007) argued that the decrease or increase in intellectual power during aging is a controversial issue. He supported the popular psychological position that states that fluid intelligence increases upto old age. Growing old in many parts of the world generates a mixed bag of feelings. It seems to be viewed by many in the modern society as a sad and negative occurrence, (Nweze, 2007; Gorman, 1997). After the age of 65, the road turns down hill with an ever increasing scope racing quickly towards death, (Nweze, 2007; Denga and Udoh, 2002).

Nweze reported that this perception is projected by many institutions and values in the society, especially the media and advertisement agencies where the experience of the aged is distorted and discounted. When the negative image is continually being perpetuated, the aged cannot help but feel worthless and left-out. The message seems to be that you must be young to be worthwhile. There is increasing concern over the number of old people who drop dead while waiting on queues to receive their pension. The aged are sometimes treated as good-for-nothing individuals and are pushed aside by the younger generation. They cannot be hired for jobs through which they can still contribute to national development and to worsen the situation, they seem not to be respected by the youths, (Nweze, 2007). These situations

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concerning the aged are quite disturbing because it seems as if the youths have abandoned their forebears. Although the fears and claims as expressed above are so widely spread in the Nigerian society today, little by way of research seems to have been done to support or contradict these claims. Available literatures on the aged have concentrated on variables other than youths' perception of the aged. This paper is an attempt to fill this gap. This study is an investigation into the nature of perception of the youths towards the aged in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to determine whether Cross River State youths perceive the aged positively or negatively.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that the outcome of the study will be a window through which the public will be properly informed about the relationship between the aged and the youths in Cross River State with a view to addressing any anomaly through appropriate policy formulation by government.

Research Question

This study was guided by one research question which states thus: What is the perception of the youths towards the aged in Cross River State?

Research Hypothesis

The following research hypothesis was formulated and tested in the study:

Youth's perception of the aged in Cross River State is not significantly positive.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design adopted in this study was the survey. This method was preferred because it involves a systematic collection, organization, analyses and interpretation of data on youth's opinions concerning their perception of the aged in their mist, using a sample of their population instead of the entire population. This is what survey is all about.

Population of the study

The population of the study comprised all SS2 students of public secondary schools in Cross River State in the 2010/2011 academic session which number stood at 10, 591. This information was obtained from the statistics department of the State Secondary Education Board in Calabar.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sampling techniques were both stratified random sampling in which the schools were chosen based on the three(3) Education zones in the state, and there after

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the simple random sampling to select the participants and participating schools. From a total of 232 public senior secondary schools across the three education zones, 60 schools were randomly selected. In each of the schools selected 30% of the student population were randomly selected and used as the study sample. The sample of the study consisted of 1, 116 students randomly selected from a total population of 10,591 from 232 public secondary schools in the three education zones of Cross River State. Their ages ranged from 14 – 20years.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled: Youths Perception of the Aged Questionnaire (YPAQ). The instrument consisted of two sections A and B.

Section A of the instrument sought information on the participants' demographic data while section B was made up of ten (10) items measuring youths' perception of the aged. This instrument was developed by the researchers. It was a four (4) point Likert rating scale type ranging from strongly Agree to strongly Disagree.

Validation of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the instrument, experts in Educational Psychology as well as test and measurement were employed to evaluate the adequacy or otherwise of the items of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability coefficient of the instrument for the study was determined by the score of 0.88 obtained from a pilot study using Cronbach alpha method. This score was adjudged good enough for the study.

Administration of Research Instrument

The instrument was administered by the researchers with the help of the teachers in each of the selected schools. Completed copies of the instrument were retrieved the same day they were administered.

Method of Data Analysis

The data generated from participants were analyzed according to the hypothesis which guided the study. To this effect, the population t-test was employed.

Result

Research Hypothesis: Youths' perception of the aged in Cross River State is not significantly positive.

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This hypothesis is a one sample mean hypothesis, so the population t-test statistical technique was employed in testing for significance. The result of analysis is as presented in Table I.

Table I: Population t-Test Analysis of Youths' Perception of the Aged.

Variables	N	\bar{x}	SD	t
Youths perception of the aged	1116	30.013	4.818	34.386*
Hypothesized or Reference mean	-	-	25.00	

* Significant at .05, df = 1115, critical t=1.96

The result of analysis in Table I reveals that, the calculated t-value of 34.386 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance with 1115 degrees of freedom.

This translates that youths' perception of the aged is significantly positive. By this result, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of Result

The result of testing the hypothesis as presented in Table I shows that youths' perception of the aged in Cross River State, Nigeria is significantly positive. The calculated t-value of 34.386 was quite high and greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance with 1115 degrees of freedom.

This result is in agreement with the finding of Bassey (2006) who carried out a study of adolescents' perception of the aged and their attitude towards them in Northern Cross River State, Nigeria and found out that their perception of the aged was significantly positive and high.

Nweze (2007) opined that some cultures including South-East of Nigeria view aging positively. Kolo (2007) added that the aged are respected, served, and their opinions are highly rated in decision making in the society. Also, Ukpong (2004) has observed that older persons have vast reservoir of knowledge, experience, and wisdom which the society can draw from in formulating development strategies as well as in solving socio political problems. Older persons have been observed to contribute to the family sustainability when they became too old to work outside the home by caring for the children and helping with house keeping, (Nweze, 2007). Obviously such aged persons will certainly be perceived positively by the youths. Since growing old is a process that must be experienced by every living person, having the aged persons in our homes is inevitable and beneficial. Having the aged in the house makes him/her an indispensable contributor to family wellbeing, friends and neighbours as they get involved in caring for and generation and management of family resources.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study, it was concluded that youths in Cross River State, Nigeria have high and positive regards for the aged members of the society. They show respect to them and involve them in planning for the development of the State and Nation in general. It is therefore recommended that since the perception of the aged by the youths in Cross River State was significantly positive, adolescents should be encouraged to be more positive towards them as they stand to draw immensely from their wealth of experience.

- ii. Communication flow between the aged and the youths should be positive and regular so as to encourage cross fertilization of ideas, which may produce a hybrid from the old and young cultures. This can bring about a rejuvenation of the old value system which is fast eroding away in our so call modern society.
- iii. Government should regularly organize interactive programmes to give the youths and aged opportunity to relate and interact at close range. This will give the aged a sense of belonging and worthiness.
- iv. Government should formulate policies that will give the aged opportunities to still render valuable services in advisory or any other capacities to help move the society to higher heights.

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