
TEACHERS ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS TOWARDS MALE-FEMALE SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STUDENTS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ONDO EAST AND WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

In Nigeria and other developing nations, the way adolescent males and females in secondary schools advance sexual relationship towards one another and the health outcome of their actions is gradually becoming an issue of concern to health educators and researchers. Reactions of teachers and school administrators towards this development are raising concerns. This study therefore examines the attitudes of secondary school teachers and heads of schools towards' sexual relationships amongst students in secondary schools in Ondo East and West Local Government Areas of Ondo State. Respondents were made to fill in questionnaires, which elicited their views and attitudes towards students' sexual relationships; knowledge of sexuality education; and how they assisted students on sexual related issues. The heads of schools and sixty teachers guidance and counselors include, were interviewed. The results of this study showed a range of teachers' attitudes and reactions towards students' sexual relationships. Many teachers favoured the provision of sex education; yet most of them were either ignorant of sex education or did not see a reason to assist

or educate students in sexual related matters. Some teachers punished students in sexual related relationships; this indicated negative attitudes towards students sexual relationships. This paper recommends ways to improve students' wellbeing through the provision of effective sexuality education to students in secondary schools, strengthening assistance and support systems in schools, and establishment of sexuality education programmes for teachers and students.

Keywords: Sexuality education, students sexual relationships, teachers attitudes.

Matters concerning sexual relationships and their results and effects on secondary school students are on the increase and common, especially in Ondo town and its environs (Oloyede&Afolabi, 2013). The constant occurrence of students' sexual activity in schools has caused public concern. The outcome of sexual relationships such as schoolgirls' pregnancy and expulsion of pregnant girls from schools are serious matters of concern, while others include; poor academic performance, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV infections, and conflict between teachers and students (Richard, 2001). According to Action Health Inc. (2010) for instance, the total number of students who dropped out of school due to pregnancy related reasons were 4,829 in 2009. Studies by Oloyede&Afolabi, (2013) show that a large percentage of adolescents are sexually active but lack basic knowledge of the biological functioning of the bodies and the risks involved in becoming sexually active at an early age. More often than not, this ignorance has made adolescents vulnerable to unplanned pregnancies, hazardous abortions, as well as STIs, including HIV/AIDS (Adepoju, 2005).

Surprisingly, with this level of ignorance, teachers' reactions to students' sexual activity in schools has not always been encouraging. This means a student found involving in any sexual activity or relationships, is punished instead of being assisted or advised otherwise; hence, students miss school and education (Petro, 2009). Teachers could play an imperative role in both shaping academic development, and influencing social lives of students. However, Adepoju (2005) argued that teachers tend to concentrate on academics, ignoring important social aspects of life like sexuality. Although teachers are the preferred agents for provision of sexual and reproductive health education to students in schools (Hellar, 2001), they are reluctant in doing so. Studies which examined attitudes towards provision of sex education in schools in developing countries, indicated that studies on teachers' attitudes towards students' sexual relationships in Nigeria are lacking and therefore this paper intended to bridge the gap.

Therefore, this study investigated teacher' attitudes towards students' sexual relationships in secondary schools by examining their knowledge of sex education, their views, and reactions towards students' sexual relationships.

Methods

Participants

Sixty secondary school teachers, and six heads of schools from six secondary schools in Ondo East and West Local Government Areas were sampled to participate in the study. Teachers and schools in this sample were purposively sampled, basing on availability and locations respectively (Cohen, Monion&Marrison, 2011). The teachers were both male and female aged between 25 and 55; the majority (81%), were young teachers aged between 30 and 40 years, and (19%) were aged 45 years and above. Heads of schools were all males aged above 50 years. Most of the participants were degree holders and a few had NCE in education, employed on permanent employment basis, teaching different subjects. Most of the respondents, 73%, were Christians and 27% Muslims. The teaching experience of teachers, having more than 10 years' experience in the teaching profession. None of the teachers, however, had taught at the current school for more than seven years concurrently. Most (80%) of teachers were married and 20% singles.

Instruments and Procedures

The large body of the data were obtained using questionnaires and were triangulated by interviews and social conversations between the researcher and teachers. Ten teachers from each school volunteered to complete the questionnaire that was designed to investigate their views and reaction towards students' sexual relationships; their knowledge of sex education; and how they helped or supported students on sexual matters. Twenty four of the teachers (four from each school) and the six heads of schools were interviewed. The questionnaire comprised four sections; the first section looked at the demographics of respondents which included ages, sex, marital status, and religion of respondents as well as the time each teacher had been at the studied schools. In the second section, respondents were asked to agree or disagree on a list of questions regarding students' sexual relationships – this section of the questionnaire was designed to get teachers' view on students' sexual relationships. In the third section, respondents were asked to answer questions concerning their knowledge of sex education and how they help their students make sexual relationship decisions, and in the last section, respondents were asked to state their reactions towards students who were involved in sexual relationships.

Interviews with heads of schools were done using semi-structured format. A guideline, which highlighted key issues to be discussed, was prepared. As stressed by Langridge (2004) the questions in the guideline were open ended to encourage the respondents to discuss their views elaborately about the topic. Issues investigated included how teachers handle students sexual matters and sexual relationships of

students in schools. On the otherhand, 24 teachers were engaged in an unstructured interviews with the aim of getting their face-to-face (concrete) responses to incorporate in their knowledge and beliefs in which their attitudes could be tapped. Lastly, the data generated through questionnaire and interviews were triangulated by social conversations done between the researcher and some teachers in the study field. The instruments (questionnaire and interview) guidelines were prepared in English and there was no translation. Data obtained from the interviews were subjected to content analysis technique, whereby, written and spoken responses from participants were summarized and reported thematically. Some data from questionnaire were tabulated; frequencies and percentages were computed to analyse participant's responses regarding their views and reactions towards student' sexual relationships, and their knowledge of sex education. These responses gave insights of teachers' attitudes towards students' sexual relationships.

Results

Table 1: Teachers' Responses on Students' Sexual Relationships

Statement about how students who are in sexual relationships should be treated	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Students found in sexual relationship should be expelled from school	6	10	54	90
Students found in sexual relationship should be educated about sex and sexual relationships	57	95	3	5
Students found in sexual relationship should be allowed to practice sexual activity for their healthier sexual development	35	55.33	25	41.67
Students found in sexual relationship should be given advise and be allowed to remain in schools	54	90	6	10

N = 60

Teachers were provided with four statements, which required them to agree or disagree with the suggestions on how students who were in sexual relationships should be treated. As illustrated in table I above, the first statement read, 'students in sexual relationships should be expelled from school'. Fifty four (54) of the respondents disagreed with the statement, and only six agreed. The second statement stated, 'students in sexual relationships should be taught about sex and sexual relationships'. Fifty seven teachers agreed with the statement; In, the third statement, which stated that 'students should be allowed to practice sexual activity for their healthier sexual development', thirty-five (35) respondents agreed while twenty five (25) disagreed. The last statement read, 'students in sexual relationships should be assisted, supported and be allowed to remain in schools'. Fifty four (54) teachers agreed with the statement; and six teachers disagreed.

This information implies that most teachers prefer the provision of sex education, assistance, and support to students, and allowing them to continue with studies even if they are found involving themselves in sexual relationships instead of expelling them from schools. This corresponds with Mkumbo's (2010) finding that an overwhelmingly majority of teachers supported the provision of sex education in schools, as well as the idea that the school and parents should share the responsibility to provide sex education to children. Conversely, teachers are against students' sexual activity in schools.

Data from interviews show that schools are guided by rules and regulations that have to comply with the country's laws and directives. According to rules and regulations, any kind of students' sexual relationships is strictly prohibited. This was emphasised by one principal of a school during interview, who said:

"...there are school rules and regulations. Schools operate under laws of the country. In short, here in this school, we take sexual relationships as violation of school rules and regulations. Students are punished when we find them involving in sexual relationships. When, for example, a girl is put in family way, we terminate her studies..."

This shows that, although teachers would tolerate students' sexual relationships, rules and regulations may force them to instigate punishment in forms of corporal punishment or expulsion of students from schools. In Nigeria, pregnancy while in secondary schools is punished by automatic expulsion of the girl from school and if the male responsible is also at school, he is also expelled (Oloyede&Afolabi, 2013).

Teachers' Knowledge of Sex Education

In this study, having a formal training in sex education was taken as a criterion for teachers being knowledgeable of sex education. To get this information, teachers were required to indicate if they had ever attended any sex education training; and if 'yes' then, they were asked to indicate the topics learned during the training. Fourteen teachers indicated they had attended some seminars or workshops on sex education, while, forty six had never attended any formal sex education training.

The following topics, which relate to sex education, were mentioned by fourteen respondents:

- a. Sexual and reproductive health education
- b. Sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS
- c. Sexual relationships
- d. Sexual behaviours

Further, the interviews with teachers revealed that, most teachers have basic knowledge of sex and sexuality, which is acquired through personal studies (i.e., readings), experience, and mass media. Teachers agreed that there were no sex education

programmes in which they could be trained about sex education. This was noted during interview session with teachers; one teacher highlighted that:

“...I had never heard about or attended any training on sex education but had read books, magazine newspapers from which I learnt a lot about sexual relationships...”

This was also intensified by two heads of schools when they insisted that:

“...As a school we don't have sex education programmes and I don't think it is available in any secondary school in this state...”

“...Sex education does not really exist in our school or any other school that I know...”

These statements can be interpreted to mean that there were no sex education programmes for either teachers or students in the studied schools. Since sex education was not the area teachers could bother to concentrate, neither the schools nor teachers themselves were taking initiatives to develop sex education programmes for teachers, students or the schools in general. Adelusi and Bernard (2011) indicated that in Nigeria, sexuality education in schools is not provided as a subject; rather it is mainstreamed in other subjects such as Biology, Social Studies, Home economics and Physical and Health Education. Therefore, it is next to impossible for teachers to concentrate on sex education.

Teaching Sex Education to Students

Teachers were asked to indicate whether they teach sex education to their students. The respondents were required to indicate yes or no to the questions asked, *“Have you ever discussed sex and sexuality topics with your students?”* beneath to this, those who indicated ‘yes’ were asked to mention the topics they discussed with their students. Thirty two teachers showed that, they have had discussed sex education with students in their different subjects, while twenty eight teachers indicated to have never discussed any sex education with their students. The topics that were mentioned include:

- I. Reproduction (in Biology/ Physical & Health education)
- II. Sexual intercourse at early ages (in Biology/ Physical & Health education)
- III. Sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS (in Biology/ Health education)
- IV. Body and behaviour changes of adolescents (in Biology)
- V. Life skills and family matters (in Social Studies/ Physical & Health education)

As it can be seen on the above list of topics, which teachers discussed with students; it is clear that many teachers, who taught sex education, did as so incidental part of academic subjects. Four topics were part of Biology/ Physical & Health education subject and one was part of social studies subject.

Table 2: Teachers’ Responses on Reasons for Provision of Sex Education to Students

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Sex education informs students about the impact of early sexual activity	14	23.3
Sex education gives students knowledge about sex, sexuality and sexual relationships and it puts them at a good position of making right decision	12	20.0
Sex education makes students informed about what good things they may practice in sexual relationships	10	16.7
Sex education makes students understand themselves better before they engage in sexual relationships	10	16.7
Sex education provides students with knowledge to cope with the contemporary world socially and academically	8	13.3
Sex education helps student to make use of the preventive measures when engaging in sexual relationships at their age.	6	10.0

N = 60

There were no separate programmes for teaching sex education to students in the studied schools as one head of school expressed that:

“...There are no teachers teaching sex education in their schools. Only that Biology, physical education and Home Economics teachers teach some topics related to sexuality like reproduction, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

Although many teachers, seemingly, are not teaching sex education to students, it is surprising that all respondents in the studied schools were positive with, and supported, the idea that sex education should be taught to students. Sex education was viewed very important to students. Many reasons were given to support the provision of sex education to students as summarised in Table 2 above.

Assisting Students to Make Right Sexual Relationship Decisions

Table 3: Teachers’ Ways of Helping Students to Make Right Sexual Relationship Decisions

Ways used to help students	Frequency	Percentage
To enlighten students about adolescence and sexual relationships and their outcomes to life of a student	42	70
To counsel and advise them to concentrate on studies rather than involving in sexual relationships	32	53.3

To give them assistance in time they face sexual related problems	20	33.3
To teach them the right and appropriate time for healthy reproduction	6	10
To explain to them the advantages and disadvantages of sexual relationships at their teen ages	6	10
To teach them to respect both sexes	4	6.7
To discuss with them life experiences	4	6.7

N = 60

An open question on how teachers assist students to make right sexual relationship decisions was given to teachers in the questionnaire. Teachers indicated how they were assisting their students towards making right sexual relationship decisions. Each way was treated independently. As summarised in Table 3 above the teachers' responses indicate that, *to educate students about adolescence and sexual relationships and their outcomes to life of a student*, was the response, which forty two teachers mentioned. This means many teachers preferred provision of sex education to students. The response that got second rank in frequency was *to advise students to concentrate on studies rather than involving in sexual relationships*; thirty two teachers mentioned it and other responses were related to these two as they appear in the table above.

On the other hand, interview data emphasised on discussing with students and advising them how they can handle sexual relationships. These suggested methods were used when teachers notice students' sexual relationships or behaviour changes. This was enunciated during interview by one teacher, who asserted that they discuss with students and advise on how to handle sexual relationships at school. Many students fall in sexual relationships unknowingly or with the pressure to comply with their fellows, then they face lots of problems like performing lowly academically.

Discussion

The intent of the study was to make inferences with regards of the views, reactions and knowledge of teachers in sex education and their attitudes to students sexual relationships. The responses from both teachers and head of schools indicate mixed attitude toward students' relationship.

Firstly, observation shows that the teachers possess positive attitude towards students' wellbeing especially through much emphasis on educating them. Akinbile, Adelusi and Bernrad(2011) postulate that according to findings, sex education could be beneficial to students and community in general. Sex education is an integral aspect of

total school programme as all respondents recognized this. Regardless of paltry training of teachers on sex education and negative attitude of some teachers toward students' sexual relationships, there are some efforts, which Nigeria Secondary School teachers are taking to help students by either teaching or advising them on sex and sexuality matters. The inclusion of sex education into the school curriculum was viewed as fundamental to make them comprehend the benefits and detriments of sexual activity. However, Adepoju(2005) claimed that sex and relationship education (SRE) is not part of the school curriculum in Nigeria, implying that its potential in addressing young peoples' sexual health problems has not been achieved.

Secondly, teachers' knowledge of sex education is an issue to for due consideration. Teachers want their students to be given sex education, but they, themselves are not well equipped with the necessary and adequate tools for implementing sex education in the school. Thus, there are no programme for sex education to students and this may support the assertion of Mkumbo (2010) that though, teachers may be committed to providing sex education in schools, they are currently incapacitated to do so because of low recognition of sex education in the school curriculum. Furthermore, the results show negative attitudes of teachers toward students sexual relationship as illustrated by teachers' reactions. It was found that when students were discovered involving in sexual relationship, they were punished on the spot. This provides the picture of how matters related to sexual act are treated in secondary schools. This information also exposes teachers and school Administration's reaction toward student sexual relationship as negative. It can be said that student sexual relationships are viewed and treated as violation of school rules and regulations or as students' indiscipline behaviours which deserves punishments. This is consonant with the findings of Oloyede and Afolabi (2013) that when students are found engaging in sexual relationship, they get expelled from school instantly.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, sex before marriage is generally regarded as taboo and issues relating to sex are perceived too private to be discussed within the society and especially within the family (Afolabi and Oloyede,2011). Majority of the teachers who took their time to deal with sex and sexuality matters in schools concentrated on what Kelly (2001) refers to as the risks that are associated with students' sexual activity like unplanned pregnancies, STD's including HIV infections, which leads to AIDS, and poor academic performance. Teachers failed to go deeper to finding out why students do engage in and practise sexual activity. Given that, most students miss parental and teachers' guidance, they may face difficulties and problems in making sexual decisions due to ignorance, and this may result to conflicts between adolescents and adults on sexual matters. Therefore, the Ministry of Education has to devise some purposive initiatives to train a competent cadre of teachers to provide sex education as a standalone subject and not incorporating it in academic subjects.

Life skills education, counselling skills, and sexual reproductive health education should be given due to their importance in schools so as to help students. Guidance and counselors should consider issues relating to sexual activities among the students, a cogent area of their concern in the schools. Special sex education programmes are also needed in schools so as to familiarise sex and sexuality matters and neutralise the misconceptions and sensitivity held over sex education for both teachers and students.

There should be well established help and support system or counselling and guidance units in schools. For the sake of the wellbeing of students, these are essential to be established in schools so that students can be helped to achieve their educational goals and reach their full potential instead of being expelled from schools when discovered involving in sexual relationships. The Ministry of Education needs to provide school counsellors, who are recognised and competent in counselling and guidance to help students achieve their educational goals.

Lastly but by no means the least, with all the cultural restrictions on public discussions of sexual matters, there is a need for people especially, handlers of adolescents to change their attitudes towards students' sexual relationships. These can be achieved only through the provision of effective sex education that caters for all community members in the society. School curriculum for all levels of education (primary and secondary schools as well as teachers' colleges or universities) in Nigeria should include sex education in their curriculum. Community outreach seminars and workshops on sex and health education need to be designed and implemented to help achieve this. This can help teachers, students, and the community at large acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to do away with the challenges of sex and sexuality matters.

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