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**SEXUALITY EDUCATION AND SOCIAL STUDIES: PERSPECTIVE, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

The dynamism of the subject matter, Social Studies, in recent times, has become so increasingly broadened, that it now encompasses many problems being faced by man at the centre of every issue on which Social Studies as a subject revolves. Its dynamism has made it possible to proffer solutions to various challenges being faced by man in his environment. The incidence of HIV/AIDS and other related matters as it has affected the youth, who are major culprits, calls for urgent attention in making Sexuality Education an antidote to the problem of early initiation into sexual activity and how to overcome the scourge of HIV/AIDS. This will help in no small way to bring about the development which nations of the world are yearning for, and which the youth of today (who are the leaders of tomorrow) can bring about only if they are not allowed to be wiped out by the HIV/AIDS scourge in the society. Therefore, there is a need at least to sustain the existence of homo-sapiens on the face of the earth. This paper argues that, if Sexuality Education is well harnessed through Social Studies Education, with its inbuilt concepts and principles that promote relevant concepts associated with Sexuality Education, the challenges we are facing in Nigeria as a country or in the world all-over will be a thing of the past. A healthy individual will bring about a healthy nation, who will greatly assist to bring about sustainable development in all spheres of life.

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**Introduction**

Early initiation into sexuality or sexual activities is as serious as any other social menace in the society today. Homes, schools (primary, secondary and tertiary) and government settings are all facing this social problem, and if nothing is done to curb or completely remove this high rate of illicit sexual activity, society faces the risks of losing many adolescents to unsafe induced abortions, STI's, school-dropouts, high immorality and other attendant problems of early sexual activity which is becoming the order of the day among today's youth.

In Nigeria, the percentage of young people who have had sex before their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday stands at 8% for boys and 18% for girls (UNICEF, 2004). A good percentage of them lack the knowledge about how to prevent themselves from contacting sexually transmitted diseases and how to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Studies had it that heterosexual intercourse is the leading cause of HIV/AIDS infection in Nigeria, and other causes include blood transfusion, sharing of sharp objects, e.g. needles, blades, knives, etc. and from pregnant mother to the unborn child. Apart from this, several high risk lifestyles involving the youth also contribute to high incidence of HIV/AIDS; such lifestyles include multiple sex partnerships, sexual coercion and abuse, teenage prostitution and premarital sex (Ogunyemi, 2000 and Ogunyemi, 2006).

In looking at the problem critically, it calls for an urgent attention to change the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This change can only be brought about through education, through educating the girl child, through instituting legal and social reforms, and through greater awareness and responsibility among men. Since there has

not been any potent cure or vaccine for HIV/AIDS and other related illnesses, education remains the only tool to bring about the change in the attitudes and unwholesome lifestyles of the youth to check the spread of the pandemic and correct the unwholesome lifestyles. Good-quality, basic education and skill-based sexuality education must be extended to girls and boys in order to change the course of their vulnerability (UNICEF, 2004). Piot (2004) advocated for prevention methods such as the “ABC” approach – Abstinence, Be faithful to your partner, and Use Condoms.

The main focus of sexuality education is behaviour change and empowerment of the target audience with the knowledge, skills and values that will change their orientation towards illicit sex practices (Ogunyemi, 2006).

It has become important for Social Studies educators therefore to critically look into the content of Social Studies to see where sexuality education has been incorporated into it, since education remains the only viable vaccine to curb the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and change the attitudes of the youths towards unwholesome sexual practices. This would help in no small way to bring about less emphasis on the purely ‘biologically aspects of sexuality, in favour of stronger emphasis on the social content in which sexual attitudes form and sexual decisions are made’ (Frogow and Haberland, 2005). Such approach would mostly be placed not within (or at least not exclusively within) a biology rubric, but as part of what might broadly be understood as Social Studies. In doing this, there may be one or two challenges, one, meaning and understanding of the concept of Sexuality Education, and two, the incorporation of it into a Social Studies programme and the problems of evaluation.

This paper is aimed at highlighting the challenges and suggesting possible solutions to problems Social Studies Educators may likely face in the course of imparting the knowledge of Sexuality Education in Nigeria.

### **Perspective of Comprehensive Sexuality Education**

Sexuality Education is often discussed and evaluated in terms of its roles in reducing adolescent pregnancy and STD rates. Supporters say its primary goal is broader – to give young people the opportunity to receive information, skills that will enable them to resist becoming sexually active before they are ready, to prevent unprotected intercourse and to help young people become responsible healthy adults.

Youthnet (2002) asserted that Sexuality Education in schools can result in delaying first intercourse or, if young people are already sexually active, in using contraception. It was stated that young people need accurate information about sexuality so they can make better and informed decisions because it was discovered that changing knowledge and attitudes about sexual behaviour is far easier than changing behaviours.

Therefore, Sexuality Education in Nigeria is defined as a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs and values on youth reproductive health. It encompasses sexual development, reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, attention intimacy, body image and gender role. It is a process of building a strong foundation for sexual health (Action Health Incorporated, 2003). Sexuality Education is not the same as teaching young people how to make love, rather it involves helping young people have a thorough understanding of who they are as boys or girls right from birth as well as to assist them cope effectively with the physical, emotional and social change at each stage of development (Rosen et al, 2004). Because of this, two contending schools of thought have come up. The first is the Abstinence-only Sexuality Education Model which does not require any special or new curriculum. It rather limits itself to such school subjects like biology and health science. The approach believes that only parents and religious groups should be allowed to handle issues relating to sexual life in a way the tradition permits and more importantly young people are more comfortable in discussing sexual issues like that with their parents. The second school of thought is the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Model, which is very liberal with the discussion of sex and sexuality issues. Here, it is believed that it is insufficient to talk about discouraging sex through abstinence-only because many youths are already sexually active. An integrated package that will focus on issues ranging from reproductive health, human sexuality, sex education, STDs, and condoms usage to discrimination and human rights, respect for women, and the information and life skills particularly needed by girls (Scheffer, 1994) is greatly germane. Nigeria seems to have adopted programmes in Family Life Education and Sexuality Education, with focal messages on HIV/AIDS, into school programmes and teacher training institutions (Ohiri-Aniche and Odukoya, 2004 in Ogunyemi, 2006).

The essence of Sexuality Education, according to the Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria, includes the following to the beneficiaries:

- to appreciate their bodies;
- to interact with both genders in appropriate and respectful ways
- to avoid exploitative relationship with the opposite sex partner
- to develop self confidence and life skills;
- to talk with the partner about sexual activity before it occurs, including setting sexual limit and how to delay commencement of sexual activity for those who have not starts;

- if sexually active, to use contraceptive methods and use them effectively
- to practice health promoting behaviour, such as regular medical check-ups, breast/testicular self-examination, and
- to understand the impact (positive and negative) of peer and media messages on thoughts, feelings, values and behaviours.

However, comprehensive Sexuality Education is aimed at putting an end to the scourge of HIV/AIDS and other sexual problems, and also developing in the learners the survival skills needed to cope with pressure that might arise from the opposite sex in order to checkmate the spread of HIV/AIDS and ensure the sustainability of the human race from being wiped out by the scourge. This will act as catalyst for socio-economic development and its sustainability.

### **Sexuality Education and Social Studies**

Social Studies as a school subject was introduced into the Teachers' colleges and secondary modern schools of the defunct Western Region of Nigeria through the Ohio project in 1957 but in the year 1963, five years after, the subject emerged in the Nigerian school system through an experimental project at the Ayetoro Comprehensive High School in Egbado division of the old Western Region (Adewuya, 2002). Since its introduction into the Nigerian school system, the subject has witnessed most rapid changes in its meaning, scope and content over time. Social Studies contents are generated from the various elements of human life. Hence, Social Studies is also defined, according to Kissock (1981), as a programme of study which a society uses to instill in students the knowledge, skills, attitudes and actions it considers important concerning the relationship human beings have with each other, the world and themselves. Changes in any of these dictate a review of the Social Studies curriculum in order to live up to its nature as a problem-solving discipline. For instance, the origin of Social Studies in African schools has been traced to the dissatisfaction with the inherited colonial education in post-independent Africa in the 1960s (Ogunyemi, 2006). In line with this, the need for Sexuality Education to be incorporated into Social Studies is very obvious, going by the contents and thematic focus of the two subject matters area of addressing widespread sexuality issues and involving emancipation of values and life-long skills. In most countries, Sexuality Education has been introduced with Social Studies as the most appropriate subject of integration because of the affinity they share in common (Department of Education, 2002). Here, we are going to look at the affinity between Sexuality Education and Social Studies in the areas of their objectives, scope and methods.

One of the objectives of comprehensive Sexuality Education in Nigerian schools is to make students to recognize the place of attitude, values and insights. It provides opportunity for individuals to question, explore and assess their sexual attitudes in order to develop their own values to enhance self-esteem and to develop insight concerning relationship with members of both sexes, and understand their obligations and responsibilities to others. This objective tallies with the desire of Social Studies Education programme which has been developed on the assumption that formal education can be effective in influencing a child's social understanding and behavior, sexual behaviour inclusive (Anise, 1999). Social Studies is aimed at influencing the student's attitude and behaviour over time, developing in him the skills for making responsible decisions about the controversial issues of his reproductive behaviour and other related matters (Osalusi, 2009).

Apart from this, the affinity between the two subject matters is further emphasized by their content. The integration of Sexuality Education concept into Social Studies has the potential of giving more attention to sexuality issues like relationship which encompasses families, love, friendship, dating, marriage and life commitments, parenting and relationship with the larger society, customs, traditions, etc. Other concepts to be emphasized by the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Curriculum for Nigeria in Social Studies Education include personal skills in values, self-esteem, communication and decision making, sexuality and society, sexuality and religion and gender roles. On the aspect of teaching methodologies to use in the teaching of Sexuality Education, both Sexuality Education and Social Studies Education programme also emphasize affinity as both place much emphasis on student-centred approach like inquiry and value clarification (Ogunyemi, 2006).

The inquiry strategy means getting answers to questions through the collection and analysis of data. It is the development of an answer by the learner based on the result of his own investigation. In his search for the answer to the problem, the student probes over several sources of relevant information, analyzes these, organizes the information, concludes, and decides on the best alternative solution (Osalusi, 2009). In a value clarification strategy, the learner is assisted to critically examine all facts and information connected with controversial or ethical issues (contraception, use of condom, abortion, masturbation, family size, age at marriage, etc) with a view to recognizing their strengths and weaknesses so as to arrive at well-reasoned and informed decisions (Ogunyemi, 2006).

### **Challenges and Prospects of Sexuality Education in Nigeria**

Drawing from youth studies, researchers have argued the need to begin Sexuality Education at younger ages and in younger grades (Eggleston et al., 1999). Unfortunately, in some cases, implementing this shift boils down to focusing only on negative aspects of sexuality (protection against abuse) or on lessons about intercourse and contraception for children who are not prepared for such information. This might be one of the reasons why some religious bodies are against the idea of Comprehensive Sexuality Education being introduced into the Nigerian school system as against abstinence-only Sexuality Education.

The contents/curriculum of Social Studies Education programme is expected to run through the senior secondary school classes and since it is among the core subjects to be studied in the senior classes, the subject is expected to be one of the subjects to be examined at the senior school certificate level. But, since the subject has been introduced into the school system some decades ago the dream of it being examined at the certificate class has not become a reality. This might also affect the integration of Sexuality Education into Social Studies Education even as the programme cut-across all levels of educational programme in Nigeria.

Apart from this, it has been argued that Nigerian teachers seem to lack sufficient curriculum skills (Ogunyemi, 2003) for seizing the initiative of relevant concepts and principles in existing Social Studies curricula for primary and secondary schools to promote the development of Sexuality Education. This is particularly compounded by the absence of a vibrant supportive professional association like the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) of the United States of America for further training of Social Studies teachers. It is believed that the Social Studies Association of Nigeria (SOSAN) will rise up to the challenge. Hence, there is the problem of poor quality textbooks and illustration materials as well as widespread use of expository instructional methods as against the innovative and development of ones that amplify students-centred strategies like value clarification, problem solving, inquiry and project methods (Ogunyemi, 1999, Osalusi, 2009). The available textbooks in the subject matter are purely foreign though recently NGO's are now publishing materials that are worthwhile in the area of Sexuality Education.

Poverty and underdevelopment is another challenge being faced in Nigeria as it significantly hinders progress in the entire educational process in Nigeria. Now that we are in the age of ICT explosion, the old process of classroom learning has become outdated. Teacher-centred approach to instruction to self training through multi-media facilities including computer-based and website tutoring is now the order of the day. Such facilities, except for few elite schools in urban centres where only about 30% reside, are still a luxury in Nigeria. However, some states in Nigeria have included among their policy statements plans to distribute laptop computer to both the teachers and students in their various states. For instance, Ekiti State Government has distributed over fifteen thousand laptops to both teachers and students in the state so that they would be able to compete favourably well with other teachers and students in the developed countries of the world. The problem now is that many of the teachers are not ICT compliant and it is believed that if government can organize a kind of short course seminar for the teachers on the usage of computer system it would go a long way towards better performance and better impartation to learners.

### **Religion**

It is often said that behaviour comes out of our belief system and so religion plays an important role in individual's sexuality as its principles, regulations and practices affect our everyday interactions and that religious beliefs influence sexual attitudes and behaviour. It has been observed that religion plays prominent roles (positively) at influencing the behaviour of its adherents. It includes assertiveness, postponement of age of first sexual experience, diminished pre- and post-marital sexual permissiveness, responsible relationships in marriage and parenthood. But religion has continued to pose a daunting challenge to the successful implementation of sexuality education in Nigeria since the two major religions are at variance with their receptiveness to the subject matter. For instance, Christianity is seen as less rigid and highly adaptable to societal change unlike Islam that is very rigid and very conservative and believes that Islamic moral philosophy supersedes whatever sexuality education has as concept and scope.

### **Conclusion**

An overview of Social Studies Education greatly reveals its sensitivity to events as they unfold and makes it a suitable curriculum area for the incorporation of Sexuality Education concepts. Since the youth are more prone to high level of immorality and this has greatly affected the educational body, it is believed that if the concept of Sexuality Education is succinctly integrated into Social Studies Education programme it would go a long way to checkmate the menace. This would invariably assist in sustaining our educational system which is going to bring about socio-economic sustainable development to the country. Government should put into use the "political will" to

make the policy that established the Sexuality Education functioning or implemented in various levels of our educational system in Nigeria. As regards the modern methods of teaching, government of various States in Nigeria should make it a duty to organize seminars for teachers to make them ICT compliant.

Finally, reframing Sexuality Education – so that it rests upon Social Studies-oriented foundation, rather than the other way round – may optimize the effects of Sexuality Education. Given that entrenched gender norms contribute to sexual health outcomes and that they are mutable (Rogow, 2000, Pulerwitz et al 2004) Rogow et al, 2005), it seems reasonable to hypothesize that tinkering with gender attitudes may ultimately prove vital to achieving significant change in Sexuality Education indicators such as delaying sexual debut, promoting contraceptive and condom use, and reducing rates of infection and unwanted pregnancy.

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