

GENDER INFLUENCE ON TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE,
WILLINGNESS AND COMFORTABILITY IN TEACHING SEXUALITY
EDUCATION IN OSUN STATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS
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GENDER INFLUENCE ON TEACHERS KNOWLEDGE, WILLINGNESS AND COMFORTABILITY IN TEACHING SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN OSUN STATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The study examined teachers knowledge of Sexuality Education in Osun State primary schools. It determined teachers readiness and comfortability to teach the subject and ascertained the influence of gender on teachers knowledge, willingness and comfortability in teaching Elementary Sexuality Education. The study population consisted of primary school teachers in Osun State. A sample of 173 teachers was selected using the multi-stage purposive sampling procedure. Data for the study were collected using one research instrument titled Teachers Questionnaire on Elementary Sexuality Education (TQESE). Data collected were analysed using percentages, t-test and chi-square statistics. The results showed that primary school teachers had adequate knowledge of sexuality education. The majority of the teachers expressed their willingness to teach sexuality education in primary schools. The results also showed that gender did not significantly influence teachers' knowledge of sexuality education but there were gender differences in teachers' comfortability to teach the subject with male teachers expressing higher levels of comfortability than their female counterparts. The study concluded that the absence of gender difference in teachers' knowledge of sexuality education coupled with teachers' expression of their willingness and comfortability to teach the subject, the prospects for the smooth implementation of sexuality education curriculum in Osun State primary schools are very bright.

Keywords: Sexuality, elementary sexuality education, knowledge of sexuality, sex education, willingness, comfortability.

Introduction

All over the world, it is widely acknowledged that schools exist not only to impart knowledge but also to enhance students understanding of themselves and their world. Students sexual health is a critical aspect of their being which they need to understand to function effectively as members of the society. In addition to its academic content, a good school curriculum should contain a sexuality-education component aimed at preparing young people to take responsibility for their sexual health; build new morality, and impart sexual knowledge that can serve as weapons against ignorance and irresponsible sexual behaviour (Adepoju, 2005).

Sexuality education has numerous definitions from various social and educational researchers. Musa (2020) defined it as the acquisition of knowledge that

deals with human sexuality. It consists of instruction on the development of an understanding of the physical, mental, emotional, social, economic and psychological phases of human relations as they are affected by sex. In other words, sexuality education involves providing people with knowledge and skills that will enable them make informed and responsible decisions about sexual behaviors at all stages of their lives. According to Sule *et al* (2015), sexuality education helps parents, teachers, and adolescents to avoid sex related problems. In the same vein, Salami (2015) defined sexuality education as the acquisition of adequate information, attitude and beliefs about sex, sexuality, sexual identify, relationship and intimacy Ameh (2015) also viewed sexuality education as deliberate, planned and organized learning experience in the aspect of human sexuality which is intended to equip young people with the requisite skills and adequate knowledge which will enable them to develop positive attitude to sex related issues as well as to take rational decisions in line with societal expectations.

It appears from the numerous definitions of sexuality education that teenagers or young persons, rather than primary school children, have been the presumed target of school-based sexuality education. Sexuality education for primary school children is undeniably a new area in the educational curriculum of many African nations including Nigeria. This could be attributed to widespread fear among the people that open discussions of sexual matters with school children would arouse their curiosity and encourage sexual activity before they are socially and biologically mature for such activities. However, in recent times, there has been a significant increase in cases of sexual abuse of children in both the rural and urban communities. This phenomenon seems to engender a growing realization that effective elementary sexuality education is required to equip school children with such skills necessary to protect themselves from sexual abuse. Thus, there is need for the introduction of sexuality education in elementary schools.

Several arguments have been canvassed by professional educators to justify the need for sexuality education in primary schools. According to Adepoju (2005), children require sexuality education very early in life to enable them build new morality and acquire sexual knowledge that can serve as weapon against ignorance. Orji and Esimai (2003) were of the view that the introduction of sexuality education into the primary school curriculum would enable parents and teachers to attend to children's questions and concerns about sexuality.

It is widely known that before the age of five, children have seemingly endless barrage of questions which they ask about themselves and the ever-changing world around them. Quite often, they wonder why boys are different from girls; they ask questions about childbirth; they may engage in genital and sexual play; and experiment with and mimic sexual language.

The need to provide sex information to children before they become sexually active is often cited to justify sexuality education at the primary school level. Landry (2001) argued that sexuality education should be provided in primary schools, at a time when most children have not yet become sexually active and could benefit from

such information, advice and skill development. He maintained that in today's environment, where children are exposed to so many influences, beneficial and otherwise, school-based sexuality education becomes an essential source of factual information. In the same vein, Donovan (1998) professed that children need early and balanced information to best prepare them to make the responsible choices necessary to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies in later life.

Early onset of puberty is another reason often used by reproductive health researchers to canvass for elementary sexuality education. McCarthy (2000) was of the view that information on sexual development, puberty and sexually transmitted diseases should be given to children early in life to provide guidance to early bloomers. According to research findings by the American Academy of Pediatrics (cited in McCarthy, 2000), almost half of African girls of ages seven to nine reported some signs of puberty. According to McCarthy (2000), most girls aged 10 or 11 years already had a menstrual period. Such girls need to be prepared for puberty earlier so that they are not frightened or scared when physical changes occur.

A major factor in the successful introduction of school-based sexuality education curricula is the knowledge or expertise of teachers who are supposed to implement the curriculum. The need for well-trained and highly knowledgeable teachers in the implementation of school-based sexuality education programmes has been canvassed in various studies such as Adamolekun and Boyinbode (1986), Oladepo and Akintayo (1991), Ogunjimi (2006), Isiugo-Abanihe, et al (2014), Abubakar and Gali (2014), Onoyase (2018) and Musa (2020).

Unarguably, teachers are important factors in the development of any curriculum for school children. This is because they are preferred by children as the primary sources of information on issues relating to their social, moral and educational development. In addition, teachers have such uniquely high access to children that their knowledge and positive disposition to the subjects they teach are vital ingredients for effective teaching. However, with regard to elementary sexuality education, research is yet to establish the extent of teachers' disposition to the subject and their willingness and comfortability in teaching it. It is also important to know which gender of Nigerian teachers has a better disposition to elementary sexuality education than the other. The present study was therefore designed to determine such vital issues as adequacy of primary school teachers' knowledge of elementary sexuality education and also ascertain gender differences in teachers' knowledge, willingness and competence to teach the subject in elementary schools. *The main rationale is to determine teachers preparedness for teaching the subject and provide empirical information necessary for determining appropriate teaching personnel for it in Nigerian schools.*

Statement of the Problem

Several studies (Adamolekun & Boyinbode, 1986; Oladepo & Akintayo, 1991; Ogunjimi, 2006; Aniebue, 2007; Opara, et al, 2012; Isiugo-Abanihe, et al 2014; Abubakar and Gali, 2014; Onoyase, 2018; and Musa, 2020) have

demonstrated the importance of sexuality education in Nigerian schools. However, there has been little research assessing the adequacy of teachers' knowledge of the subject and their willingness and competence to teach it in Nigerian primary schools. It is apparent that sexuality education cannot be successfully introduced into primary schools in Nigeria without a preliminary attempt to determine such vital issues as the adequacy of teachers' knowledge of the subject and their willingness and competence to teach it. The study was therefore designed to achieve the following specific objectives.

Objectives of the Study

- (1) Determine adequacy of teachers' knowledge of sexuality education in Osun State primary schools;
- (2) Ascertain teachers' willingness to teach sexuality education in Osun State primary schools;
- (3) Determine teachers' comfortability to teach sexuality education in Osun State primary schools;
- (4) Determine the influence of gender on teachers' knowledge of sexuality education in Osun State primary schools; and
- (5) Ascertain gender differences in teachers' willingness and comfortability to teach sexuality education in Osun State primary schools

To achieve the objectives of the study three research questions and two hypotheses were raised.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised:

- (1) How adequate is the knowledge of elementary sexuality education of primary school teachers in Osun State?
- (2) Are primary school teachers willing to teach elementary sexuality education in Osun State?
- (3) How comfortable are primary school teachers to teach sexuality education in Osun State?

Hypotheses

- (1) Teachers' gender will not significantly influence their knowledge of sexuality education in Osun State primary schools
- (2) There is no significant gender difference in teachers' willingness and comfortability to teach sexuality education in Osun State primary schools.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey design. Data were gathered from a representative sample of primary school teachers in Osun State without the researcher manipulating the variables of interest to the study. The study population comprised teachers in public primary schools in Osun State, Nigeria. The sample

comprised 180 teachers selected using the multi-stage random sampling procedures from 30 public primary schools in the state. First, five local government areas (LGAs) were randomly selected from the 30 LGAs in Osun State. This was followed by a random selection of six public primary schools from each of the selected LGAs. From the five selected LGAs, 180 teachers from 30 schools were purposively selected such that male and female teachers were adequately represented in the study's sample

One research instrument titled Teachers Questionnaire on Elementary Sexuality Education (TQESE) was used for data collection. The instrument has three sections. Section A required the teachers to provide personal information such as name of school, sex and age. Section B was designed to assess teachers' current knowledge of sexuality education. The section contained 15 factual statements on different aspects of sexuality education to which the teachers were required to respond on a five-point scale of Completely True, True, Not Sure, Untrue and Completely Untrue. Each of the 15 items attracted a score ranging from 0 to 4 with an overall maximum score of 60 and a minimum score of 0. The higher the score a teacher got in this section, the more knowledgeable about sexuality education the teacher was. On the basis of scores obtained in this section of the instrument, the teachers were subsequently classified into three categories. Teachers with scores ranging from 0 to 20 were classified as having 'inadequate' knowledge of sexuality education. Those with scores of 21 to 40 were classified as having Fairly adequate knowledge while those whose scores were between 41 and 60 were classified as having adequate knowledge of sexuality education. Section C of the instrument contains two items. Item 1 required the teachers to indicate if they are willing to teach sexuality education while item 2 asked them to indicate how comfortable they would be if asked to teach sexuality education to primary school children.

The instrument was developed by the researcher. The initial versions of the instruments contained some items extracted from similar instruments by Oladepo and Akintayo (1991), Orji and Esimai (2003) and Ogunjimi (2006). The instrument was presented to experts in human sexuality and early childhood education, who were to determine the adequacy, relevance and suitability of its items in measuring teachers' knowledge and willingness to teach elementary sexuality education. After some modifications, re-wording and progressive pruning of the items, the instrument was adjudged by the experts to have adequate content validity. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the test-retest method. In doing this, the instrument was administered twice to 25 teachers who were not part of the main study over an interval of two weeks. Data obtained from the two administrations yielded test-retest reliability coefficients of 0.83, using Pearson Correlation statistics (r). This value was considered high enough to justify the reliability of the instrument for use in this study.

The procedure for data collection involved administering the research instrument on teachers during the researcher's visit to selected schools. After explaining the purpose of the research and the teachers' consents obtained, they

were given their copies of the questionnaire with an assurance of complete anonymity and confidentiality of their written responses. Some teachers responded to the items in the questionnaire on the spot and turned in their responses the same day while others requested the researcher to come back for their responses the following day. Consequently, out of 180 teachers who participated in the study, 173 teachers (Male 47; Female 126) returned correctly-filled copies of the questionnaire. The gender distribution of the sample reflects the proportion of male and female teachers currently employed in primary schools in the study area. Data collected from the administration of the research instruments were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, percentages were used to analyse the research questions while t-test and chi-square statistics were used to test the research hypothesis.

Results

Research Question 1:

How adequate is the knowledge of elementary sexuality education of primary school teachers in Osun State?

To answer this research question, two approaches were adopted. First, the opinions of primary school teachers were sought on what they perceived as the adequacy of their knowledge of elementary sexuality education. In this regard, the descriptive analyses of data collected on teachers perception are presented in Table 1:

Table 1

Teachers' Self-Assessment of Adequacy of their Knowledge of Sexuality Education

Assessment of Knowledge	N	Percentage
Very Adequate	43	24.9
Adequate	77	44.5
Not Adequate	43	24.8
Not Sure	10	5.8
Total	173	100.0

As shown in Table 1, 44.5% and 24.9% of primary school teachers perceived their current knowledge of sexuality education (SE) as 'very adequate' and 'adequate' respectively for teaching the subject to primary school pupils. Also, 24.8% were of the opinion that their current knowledge was not adequate while 5.8% were undecided. From this result, it was concluded that majority of primary school teachers in Osun State were of the opinion that they had adequate knowledge of sexuality education to be able to teach the subject to primary school pupils.

In order to further corroborate data collected on teachers' self-assessment of their knowledge of SE, respondents were required to respond to a 15-item questionnaire

on elementary sexuality education (Section C of TQESE) to determine their knowledge of the subject. On the basis of scores obtained in this section of the instrument, the teachers were subsequently classified into three categories. Teachers with scores above the median score of 30 were classified as having adequate knowledge; those who scored below the median score were classified as having inadequate knowledge, while teachers with scores within the median range were classified as having fairly adequate knowledge of sexuality education. Table 2 presents a summary of scores obtained by teachers on items which empirically evaluated their knowledge of sexuality education.

Table 2
Teachers' Knowledge of Sexuality Education

Level of Knowledge	N	Percentage
Adequate	73	42.2
Fair	85	49.1
Inadequate	15	8.7
Total	173	100.0

The results in Table 2 indicated that 42.2% of teachers had adequate knowledge of sexuality education while 49.1% were classified as having fairly adequate knowledge. Only 8.7% of the teachers had inadequate knowledge of the subject. When these results were taken together with those obtained from teachers' self-assessment of the adequacy of their knowledge, it was concluded that the knowledge of sexuality education by primary school teachers in the study area was generally adequate and sufficient for the teaching of the subject in primary schools.

Research Question 2:

Are primary school teachers willing to teach elementary sexuality education in Osun State?

To answer this question, data on teachers willingness to teach elementary sexuality education were analysed using percentages. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3:

Table 3
Teachers Willingness to Teach SE

VARIABLE	Response	N	Percentage
WILLINGNESS	Yes	138	79.8
	No	23	13.3
	Undecided	12	6.9
Total		173	100.0

Table 3 shows that an overwhelming majority of 79.8% of respondents expressed their willingness to teach sexuality education if introduced into primary school curriculum. Only 13.3% of respondents were not willing to teach the subject while 6.9% had not made up their minds. The summary of these results is that majority of teachers expressed their willingness to teach sexuality education in Osun State primary schools.

Research Question 3: How comfortable are primary school teachers to teach sexuality education in Osun State?

To answer this question, data on teachers' levels of comfortability to teach elementary sexuality education were analysed using percentages. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 4:

Table 4
Teachers' Comfortability to Teach SE

VARIABLE	Response	N	Percentage
WILLINGNESS	Very Comfortable	73	42.2
	Comfortable	21	12.1
	Uncomfortable	71	41.0
	Very uncomfortable	8	4.6
Total		173	100.0

The data on Table 4 showed teachers levels of comfortability if asked to teach the subject. About 42.0% reported that they would feel very comfortable in addition to 12.1% who said they would be comfortable. In contrast, 41.1% of respondents would be uncomfortable if asked to teach SE while 4.6% reported that they would feel very uncomfortable. The summary of these results is that majority of teachers reported that they would feel comfortable teaching the subject in primary schools.

Hypothesis 1:
Teachers' gender will not significantly influence their knowledge of sexuality education in Osun State primary schools

To answer this question, data obtained on teachers' knowledge of sexuality education were subjected to statistical analysis to determine the influence of gender on teachers' knowledge of sexuality education as measured by their scores in Section B of the research instrument. Table 5 presents a t-test analysis of the influence of gender on teachers' knowledge of elementary sexuality education.

Table 5
Sex Difference in Teachers' Knowledge of Sexuality Education

Sex of Teachers	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	T	P
Male	47	36.34	5.30	171	1.534	0.127
Female	126	34.19	9.03			

As shown in Table 5, male teachers had a mean score of 36.34 and a standard deviation of 5.30 while female teachers had a mean of 34.19 with a standard deviation of 9.03. A t-test analysis of these values yielded a t-value of 1.534, which is not significant at 0.05 level. This implies that the sex of teachers did not significantly influence their knowledge of sexuality education.

Hypothesis 2:

There is no significant gender difference in teachers' willingness and comfortability to teach sexuality education in Osun State primary schools.

To test this hypothesis, teachers were required to indicate in Sections C and D of the research instrument if they were willing and comfortable to teach sexuality education if the subject was introduced in their schools. Their responses were subjected to frequency counts and chi-square statistics to determine differences in the responses of male and female teachers. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 6:

Table 6
Gender difference in Teachers' Willingness and Comfortability to Teach Elementary Sexuality Education

VARIABLE		MALE		FEMALE		TOTAL		X ²
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
WILLINGNESS	Willing	34	72.3	104	82.5	138	79.8	2.21 >0.05
	Not Willing	13	27.6	22	17.5	35	20.2	
	Total	47	100	126	100	173	100	
COMFORT-ABILITY	Very Comfortable	36	76.6	37	29.4	73	42.2	49.33* <0.05
	Comfortable	10	21.3	11	8.7	21	12.1	
	Uncomfortable	1	2.1	70	55.6	71	41.0	
	Very uncomfortable	0	0	8	6.3	8	4.6	
	Total	47	100	126	100	173	100	

The data in Table 6 showed that a substantial percentage of both male (72.3%) and female (82.5%) teachers were willing to teach elementary sexuality education as against a small proportion of male (27.6%) and female (17.5%) teachers who

expressed unwillingness to teach the subject. These figures yielded a chi-square value of 2.21, which is not significant at 0.05 level. Thus, it is concluded that there were no gender differences in teachers' willingness to teach sexuality education in primary schools.

A further attempt was made to ascertain gender differences in teachers' level of comfort in teaching sexuality education. As shown in Table 5, a substantial majority of male teachers (76.6%) reported that they would be very comfortable if asked to teach the subject. On the other hand, only 29.4% of female teachers reported that they would be very comfortable teaching sexuality education. The majority of female teachers (55.6%) reported that they would be uncomfortable teaching the subject. As shown in the Table, data on teachers' levels of comfortability were subjected to chi-square statistical analysis and the analysis yielded a chi-square value of 49.33, which is significant at 0.05 probability level. Thus, it is concluded that there were gender differences in teachers' comfortability to teach sexuality education in primary schools. Specifically, male teachers reported significantly higher levels of comfortability than female teachers in the teaching of elementary sexuality education.

Discussion of Findings

The study has shown that current knowledge of sexuality education by primary school teachers in Osun State is generally adequate and sufficient for the teaching of the subject if introduced into primary school curricula. In arriving at this conclusion, data obtained from teachers' self-assessment of knowledge of SE were considered along with the teachers' scores on items measuring their knowledge of SE leading to the same conclusion that the teachers had adequate knowledge of the subject matter. This result seems contrary to widespread assumption by researchers such as Haignere and Culhane (1996), Donovan (1998) and *Alnasir and Skerman (2004)* that most teachers do not have adequate knowledge of SE to be able to teach the subject effectively at the primary school level. A plausible explanation for teachers' adequate knowledge of SE as reported in this study could be the relatively high academic and professional qualifications of participating teachers. For instance, none of the teachers who participated in the study had less than the National Certificate in Education. Many of them had Bachelor degrees and some even had postgraduate qualifications. With such high level of educational and professional qualifications, it is expected that the teachers will equally demonstrate adequate knowledge of sexuality education.

An interesting finding of the study is that the majority of teachers who participated in the study expressed their willingness to teach sexuality education in primary schools. The teachers supported the teaching of elementary sexuality education and reported that they would feel comfortable teaching the subject. The results of data analysis show that a substantial majority of the teachers were willing to participate in the teaching of SE. These results are consistent with the findings

from an earlier study by Adamolekun and Boyinbode (1986) indicating that most teachers were likely to support sex education if introduced into the school curriculum. According to the researcher, as high as 74.7% of teachers expressed their willingness to participate in the teaching of the subject if introduced in their schools. Though the percentage of teachers expressing support for sexuality education in the present study is slightly lower than what was reported by Adamolekun and Boyinbode, the results are nevertheless encouraging as they portend a bright future for school-based sexuality education in Nigeria. It would have been a major setback in curriculum implementation if the teachers who are to implement the curriculum had expressed lack of support or were unwilling to carry it out in the classroom. According to Bowden, Lanning, Pippin and Tanner (2003), teachers' attitudes, abilities and willingness to implement controversial and innovative curricula, such as sexuality education, are essential ingredients in programme success. Many authorities have long agreed that the most important factor in successful sexuality education programme is a willing classroom teacher.

The teachers' expression of willingness and comfortability to teach elementary sexuality education as found in this study is contrary to the results of many previous studies which tend to establish that majority of teachers usually feel uncomfortable teaching sexuality education. Researchers such as Klitsch (1993), Harrison *et. al* (1996), Yego (2019) and Preston (2019) shared the view that many teachers feel uncomfortable participating in SE. According to Harrison *et al*, majority of teachers feel that talking about sexuality is too risky and are afraid of professional backlash, threat of public outcry and parental disapproval. A plausible explanation for teachers' comfortability with SE in the present study is that the teachers adequate knowledge of the subject naturally made them feel confident and comfortable if asked to teach it. It is well known that lack of knowledge usually breeds fear and discomfort with teaching even among professional teachers.

Another major finding of this study is the result on the influence of gender on teachers' knowledge of elementary sexuality education in Nigerian schools. The result revealed that gender did not significantly influence teachers' knowledge of elementary sexuality education. This result is contrary to findings from a number of previous studies which investigated teachers' knowledge and attitude to sexuality education such as Aniebue (2007) and Adogu and Nwafulume (2015). Findings from these studies have generally shown that female teachers had better knowledge and more positive attitude to sexuality education than their male counterparts. The absence of gender difference in teachers' knowledge of the subject as reported in the current study could be explained in the context of several enlightenment programmes that both male and female teachers have been exposed to in recent times in the study area. It is not unlikely that the impact of these programmes might have neutralized existing gender disparities in teachers' knowledge and willingness to teach sexuality education in the selected schools. Interestingly, the absence of elementary sexuality education.

On the flip side, another finding from the current study revealed a significant

gender difference in teachers' comfortability to teach elementary sexuality education. The result showed that male teachers were more comfortable than female teachers if asked to teach sexuality education. Though this result may not find support in previous studies on the subject matter, it is nevertheless not surprising considering the huge discrepancy between proportions of female and male teachers who participated in the study. Out of 173 teachers who responded to the research instrument, only 47 were male teachers. Consequently, the higher level of comfortability expressed by male teachers over their female counterparts in the study may be attributable to the statistical effects of analyzing responses from a small sample of male teachers in contrast to responses obtained from a larger sample of female teachers.

Conclusion

The results of the study revealed that majority of primary school teachers in the study area had adequate knowledge of sexuality education irrespective of their gender. The results also indicated that the majority of teachers were willing and would be comfortable teaching the subject. The implication of this is that teachers, who are major stakeholders in the education of children, have recognized the need for sexuality education and will provide necessary support for its implementation. It appears the coast is clear for the government to begin the process of introducing sexuality education into the primary school curriculum in the state. The absence of gender difference in teachers' knowledge of sexuality education coupled with teachers' expression of their willingness and comfortability to teach the subject, the prospects for the smooth implementation of sexuality education curriculum in Osun State primary schools are very bright.

Recommendation

Though findings from the study showed that teachers had adequate knowledge of sexuality education, there is still the need for continuous training and re-training of teachers in sexuality education to enable them sustain and improve their current knowledge of the subject matter

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