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**PARENTAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS SEXUALITY  
EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS: 21ST CENTURY CLARION  
CALL TO SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATORS**

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**Abstract**

*Early sex education of our children is very vital. Hence, this study was conducted to examine the attitude of parents towards sexuality education in schools. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, the researcher selects respondents from single-parent homes and intact-parent homes an expo-facto situation. The population for the study consists of all the families in Eti-Osa Local Government Area, Lagos State. The sampled size as respondents were purposively selected 104 Male and 141 Females, total equal 245 respondents. A questionnaire titled Parental Attitude towards Sexuality Education in School Questionnaire (PASESQ) was designed and used as an instrument. The statistical analysis of the responses from the questionnaire showed that 85.9% of parents in this study had a positive attitude towards the issue of sexuality education in schools. The respondent's cultural beliefs, teachers' qualifications in health education also have an influence on their attitude towards the study of sexuality education among learners. Therefore, this study concluded that parents want their children to be informed about sex and their sexual health*

*by educators who have the skill and qualification to do so; however, they want to be notified whenever the programme is to be delivered in their child's school as a clarion call to Social Studies Educators in the 21st century and beyond.*

**Keywords:** Parents, Attitude, Sexuality education, Social Studies educators.

## **Introduction**

Sexuality education (SE) has been defined as the provision of straightforward and fundamental information about the anatomy, physiology and psychology of sex, and relating this to practical issues that normally affect adolescents continually in our contemporary societies, like contraception, abortion and STI (Crown, 2001). Sex education for children is rarely done openly in almost every culture, especially in Africa and other conservative countries like China among others. Discussions of sex and related topics are often discouraged and sometimes considered taboo because of the common belief that to inform children about sex is to encourage sexual activity or promiscuity (Izugbara, 2008). The parents not only withhold vital information about sexuality and reproduction from their children, they also impart messages of danger, fear and shame (Mahajan & Sharma, 2005).

Earlier studies have corroborated the findings of the studies done in Nigeria, where many parents were reported not to support sex education mainly for fear that children may want to indulge in sex after receiving sex education and also because of the belief that sex education is for adults (Aniebue, 2002, Esimai, 2003). Another factor may be the relative inexperience of some of these parents since they did not discuss such issues with their own parents. These parents are therefore incapacitated when it comes to the skills and confidence to play a direct role in these matters (Esimai, 2003).

On the other hand, children avoid talking to their parents about sexual matters for fear that showing a curiosity about sex would arouse unnecessary suspicion about their behaviour. Most young people however learn about sex and related topics from books,

magazines, films, television programmes, internet and peer groups (Runganga, Aggleton & Migration, 2000), resulting in imbalanced information coupled with poor quality. Studies done among adolescents to assess their knowledge about sexuality and reproductive issues have consistently shown relatively poor knowledge (Mahajan, 2005, McManus, 2008). This misinformation puts them at risk of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, unplanned pregnancy, unsafe abortion and its related complications (McManus, 2008). A study done among adolescents in Transkei, South Africa revealed that about three quarters of the adolescents interviewed were already sexually active, with poor reproductive knowledge, poor contraceptive use and one-third of the sexually active girls have been pregnant at least once (Buga, Amoko & Ncayiyana, 2003).

The incidence of sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and abortions with attending complications among adolescents in Nigeria is equally disturbing. An estimated 610 000 unsafe abortions a year are carried out in Nigeria, and about half of the 20 000 women who die from the complications of unsafe abortion are adolescents. About a million births a year in Nigeria are to teenage mothers, and abortion complications are responsible for 72% of all deaths among teenagers below the age of 19 years (Abiodun, 2002). Even though some parents oppose sex education for fear that it might unduly arouse the interest of innocent children which might result in promiscuity, research finding seems to reveal otherwise. Several studies have shown that sex education can help delay the age of first intercourse, encourage correct and consistent use of contraception and STI protection measures. The HIV/AIDS pandemic and the increasing prevalence among adolescents because of their risky sexual behaviour have also given a sense of urgency to the topic on sexuality education (Izugbara, 2008).

In Nigeria, a confluence of cultural, religious and geographical factors creates a sensitive environment where issues of sexual and reproductive health have remained highly a taboo for decades (Mack, 2011). Sexual health is an important determinant of productivity and national development everywhere. Yet, the mere mention of “Sex” seems to evoke itchy feelings among both the

young and old. Adults in the Ghanaian Society have usually refrained from discussing sexual matters with the young ones. Traditionally, children are brought up with strict discipline, fear and are punished for questioning their parents, especially the girls (Brocato & Dwamena- Aboagye, 2007). Consequently, young people are afraid to ask questions relating to sexual issues as they would be seen as “disrespectful” and “disobedient.” sexual issues are seen as topics for adult discussions only. Parents and teachers involved in sex education have divergent views and this poses a lot of problems. To some, sex education is a strong incest taboo (Kunene, 1988; Macleod, 1999) and should be discouraged. It is perceived by others as one of those social forces that come with modernization to break down the moral fabric of the entire society (Marion & McCabe, 1990).

However, children of today constantly surprise their parents with their questions and gestures. Why won't they, when sexual images confront them every day? Nowadays, it is easy to identify sexual images everywhere: in computer games, on billboards, newspapers, and television. Music videos are so sexually explicit, female dancers are almost naked and with mobile phones and computers everywhere, pornography can be accessed with a click. Again, young people are having sexual intercourse at much younger ages – that is, between 8 and 17 years (Ansah-Addo, 2005); sometimes even younger (Small & Luster, 1994; Stack, 1994; Naidoo, 2001). In a recent survey by Lim and Kui (2006), boys as young as nine years old said they have had sexual experiences. Sex education aims to reduce risks of potentially negative outcomes from sexual behaviour, equips learners with life skills, and reduces the high level of dropout and unwanted pregnancies. It provides knowledge on how to prevent the transmission of diseases such as HIV/ AIDS and other health problems. Historically, the task of instructing about sex has been seen as the responsibility of parents. Today, the term usually refers to classroom lessons about sex taught in schools. Sex education also aims at contributing to young people's positive experience of their sexuality by enhancing the quality of their relationships. It offers sexuality programmes aimed at providing accurate information about human sexuality for young

people to develop and understand their values, attitudes and beliefs about sexuality. This, according to Forrester (2009), is a means by which they are helped to protect themselves against abuse, exploitation, unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Attitude towards sex education differs from one group to another depending on many factors like dominant perceptions, social belief systems, religious factors, family socialization and cultural set up within which learners grow up (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2001). It also depends on the attitude of teachers who will be responsible for the formal aspects (Nokwe, 2002) and principally parents who are a child's first point of contact and play a vital part in the informal education of the learner. This is why parental attitude on the topic of sex education is very important. Our cultures' hesitant attitude about sexuality is evident in the limitations placed on sex education in primary and secondary schools and often in its total absence from the curriculum. There are many studies that have examined different factors related to early sexual activity (Small, Luster, & Stack, 2001), community and peer group characteristics on sexual behaviour and secondary school learners' attitude towards sex education (Bobak & Jensions, 2004, Majova, 2002).

The debate concerning sexuality education continues to this day in terms of what, how, when, to whom and who better to provide it. World Health Organization's recommendations try to set a reliable framework for these considerations to be integrated in knowledge and information, provided through sexual health education, which are essential if people are to be sexually healthy (WHO, 2010). Anyone involved in providing sex and relationship education should receive training and continuing education to ensure that the information and counselling they give are accurate, evidence-based, appropriate and free from discrimination, gender bias and stigma" (WHO, 2010). This debate mostly takes place outside of the health and education sciences arena and is very vivid in the public sphere, between various groups and cultures in terms of values and ideologies. Children, as they grow and develop into adulthood are faced with so many sexual challenges. While seeking to know and understand their sexual wellbeing, some

become victims of sexual abuse. This has led to an increase in the rate of school dropout, unwanted pregnancies, forced marriages and sexually transmitted diseases among school children, which is inimical to Education drive of 'No-Child should be left behind'. Apparently, some parents are ignorant of the role to play in providing their children with necessary information on their sexual life. This information should enable the child grow into adulthood and helps to prevent the child from making wrong decisions in life.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study examined parental attitude to sexuality education among school children in Eti-Osa Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- i. determine the attitude of parents towards the teaching of sexuality education in schools in Eti-Osa L.G.A, Lagos State;
- ii. examine the attitude of parents of different age groups towards the teaching of sexuality education in schools in Eti-Osa L.G.A, Lagos State; and
- iii. determine the attitude of parents based on gender and their child's communication towards the issue of sexuality education in schools.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were answered in the study:

- i. What is the attitude of parents towards the teaching of sexuality education in schools in Eti-Osa LGA, Lagos State?
- ii. What is the attitude of parents of different age groups towards the teaching of sexuality education in schools in Eti-Osa LGA, Lagos State?
- iii. What is the attitude of parents based on gender and their child's communication towards the issue of sexuality education in schools?

## **Methods**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, the researcher selects respondents from single-parent homes and intact-parent homes an expo-facto situation. The population for the study consists of all the families in Eti-Osa Local Government Area, Lagos State. The sampled size as respondents were purposively selected 104 Male and 141 Females (82 had a post-graduate degree, 97 with Graduate degree and 66 of them holds Secondary school certificate), totalling 245 respondents. A questionnaire titled Parental Attitude towards Sexuality Education in School Questionnaire (PASESQ) was designed by the researcher to measure the impact of parental attitude towards sexuality education on learners in the study. It has two major sections. Section 'A' contained Bio-Data information and Section 'B' focused on study questions 1-20. Each statement is evaluated and graded by respondents on the continuum ranging from Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1) that is, on a 4-point scale. This enables the researcher to assign meaning to the responses, while 0.76 reliability coefficient value was obtained, using relevant reliability test to establish reliability of instrument. The researcher uses a test – retest reliability method to ascertain the usefulness of instrument with Kuder-Richardson (r21). The results of the respondent of parents who participated in the study was recorded, tabulated and analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentages.

## **Results**

**Research Question 1:** What is the attitude of parents towards the teaching of sexuality education in schools in Eti – Osa LGA, Lagos State?

**Table 1: Responses on Assessment of Parental Attitude Towards the Teaching of Sex Education**

Items	Choice of Responses			Choice of Responses			Percentage(s)	
	SA	A	D	SD	T		+ve	-ve
Teaching of sex education is something I always want to encourage	115	87	28	15	245		82.4	17.5
It allows students to understand their body better	120	89	22	14	245		85.3	14.7
Teaching of sex education provides opportunity for proper counseling	112	95	20	18	245		84.5	15.6
Teaching of sex education is an important form of social service	118	95	24	08	245		86.9	13.1
Teaching of sex education is interesting because it deals with reality of life	123	97	18	07	245		89.8	10.2
Teaching of sex education is good since it enlightens children about facts of life	127	90	15	13	245		88.5	11.4
Teaching of sex education is good because it gives a person the opportunity to correct misconception about the subject matter	130	80	22	13	245		85.1	14.3
Sex education if handled, taught by experts will produce the desired purposes	126	84	19	16	245		85.7	14.3
Sex education will serve as a tool which provides guidelines for the planning implementation and evaluation of HIV/AIDS prevention in schools	128	79	21	17	245		84.4	15.5

In Table 1, 46.9% of the respondents were strongly of the opinion that teaching of sex education is something they always wanted to encourage, while 6.1% of the respondents strongly



disagreed. Results of this study have also shown that 48.2% of the respondents strongly agreed that teaching of sex education is an important form of social service. 3.3% of them strongly disagreed. Most of the respondents, which is 50.2% strongly agreed, that teaching of sex education is interesting because it deals with the reality of life, however, 2.9% strongly disagreed. It is obvious in this study that most of the respondents 51.8% strongly agreed that teaching of sex education is good because it enlightens children about facts of life, 5.3 % strongly disagreed. In table 4.2 below, an indication was made that majority of the respondents, 45.7% strongly agreed that the teaching of sex education provides opportunity for proper counseling, while 7.4% of them strongly disagreed with the opinion. Similarly, 49.0% of the respondents strongly agreed that sex education allows students to understand their bodies better, however, 5.7% disagreed to the opinion.

**Research Question 2:** What is the attitude of parents of different age groups towards the teaching of sexuality education in schools in Eti-Osa L.G.A, Lagos State?

**Table 2: Frequencies and Percentages of Responses the Attitude of Parents of Different Age Groups Towards the Teaching of Sexuality Education in Schools**

Items	Choice of Responses			Choice of Responses			Percentage(s)	
	SA	A	D	SD	T		+ve	-ve
It promotes immoral behavior	21	27	82	115	245		19.7	80.4
The teaching of sex education exposes students to immorality	23	23	80	119	245		18.8	81.3
Exposure of students to sex education will lead to experimentation	32	37	74	102	245		28.2	71.8
Teaching of sex education may encourage spread of HIV/AIDS	20	28	81	116	245		19.6	80.4

**Table 2 (cont'd)**

Teaching of sex education may promote Waywardness	27	24	85	109	245	20.8	79.2
Teaching of sex education to upper primary school pupils should be discouraged	23	29	87	106	245	21.2	78.8
My negative attitude to the teaching of sex education is because it is left in the hands of young teachers	103	42	78	32	245	55.1	44.9
I will appreciate if its teaching is handled by professionals	135	90	20	10	245	91.8	8.2
My attitude to its teaching is because of my own experience	23	29	84	109	245	21.2	78.8
Sex education should focus on safe sex	30	36	76	113	245	26.9	73.1
Sex education should focus on abstinence education	103	82	21	39	245	75.4	24.6

In Table 2 (section A), the findings revealed that 8.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that teaching of sex education promotes immoral behavior, while 46.9% of them strongly disagreed to the opinion. The result also show that 9.4% of the respondents strongly agreed on the opinion that the teaching of sex education exposes students to immorality, while 48.6% of the respondents strongly disagreed. The results on the table indicated that most respondents, 13.1% strongly agreed that exposure to sex education leads students to experimentation, however 41.6% strongly disagreed, which support a study among adolescents in Transkei, South Africa, which revealed that about three quarters of the adolescents interviewed were already sexually active, with poor reproductive knowledge, poor contraceptive use and one- third of the sexually active girls have been pregnant at least once (Bobak & Jensions, 2004). Also, 9.4% of the respondents observed that their attitude towards the teaching of sex education was because of their own experiences, while 44.5 % of the respondent submitted that

their attitude to sex education was not based on personal experiences. The findings also reveal that 12.2% of the respondents were of the view that sex education should focus on safe sex, 46.1% strongly disagreed. It is also indicated in the table that majority, 42.0% of the respondents strongly agreed that sex education should focus on abstinence, however 15.9% strongly disagreed.

**Research Question 3:** What is the attitude of parents based on gender and their child communication towards issue of sexuality education in school?

**Table 3: Parent Gender and Parent-Child Communication on the issues of Sex Education**

Variables	Often		Sometimes		Never	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Father	8	7.7	31	29.8	65	62.5
Mother	34	24.1	50	35.5	57	40.2

Table 3, shows that 8% of fathers and 34% of mothers often talk to their children about sex. 65% of fathers and 57% of mothers have never talked to their children about sex. 35.5% of mothers and 29.8% of fathers said they sometimes talked to their children about sex. This shows that mothers discuss sex and sex education with their children more than fathers.

## Discussions

The results showed that the attitudes of parents towards the teaching of sex education among upper primary school pupils were positive. This corroborates the study of UNESCO (2009) that sexuality education for children and adolescents plays a crucial part in their sexual and reproductive health and general wellbeing. Schools and families usually share the responsibility of providing sexuality education but the outcomes are often unsatisfactory. Sex Education, Sexuality Education, Sexual Education or Sexual and

Reproductive Health Education are only a few of the contemporary terms describing education with the primary goal that “children and young people become equipped with the knowledge, skills and values to make responsible choices about their sexual and social relationships in the world” (UNESCO, 2009). However, it negates the opinion of Aniebue (2002), Crown (2001) and Izugbara, (2008) that sex education and related topics are often discouraged and sometimes considered taboo because of the common belief that to inform children about sex is to encourage sexual activity or promiscuity.

The results indicated that most respondents, 13.1% strongly agreed that exposure to sex education leads students to experimentation, however 41.6% strongly disagreed, which support a study among adolescents in Transkei, South Africa, which revealed that about three quarters of the adolescents interviewed were already sexually active, with poor reproductive knowledge, poor contraceptive use and one- third of the sexually active girls have been pregnant at least once (Bobak & Jensons, 2004).

Gender does not influence parents’ attitude towards the teaching of sex education in upper primary schools in Eti-Osa local government of Lagos State. This is because parents find it difficult to discuss sex and sex-related issues with their children. Moreover, mothers discuss sex and sex education with their children more than the fathers. This shows that mothers discuss sex and sex education with their children more than fathers. However, it negates the opinion of Aniebue, 2002; Crown, 2001 who said that sex education and related topics are often discouraged and sometimes considered taboo because of the common belief that to inform children about sex is to encourage sexual activity or promiscuity.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, attitude of parents towards the teaching of sex education in school has been a matter of serious concern and this is affecting the dissemination of vital information, hence the need for social studies educators to help bridge the gap. The absence of the subject matter in the school curriculum has

created a gap in knowledge transfer which affects the moral standard of the children, which is a call for curriculum review with the support of the social studies educators. This gap in information transition as regards to child sexuality and sex education have created a negative influence among the children which can be considered as one of the leading factors to the spread of sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy as well as the spread of HIV and AIDS. As in many areas of research, the area of sexuality education is particularly important to national progress, as an aspect of development, denying its relevance in society will be counterproductive. Education of all sorts should be beneficial to the individual who is being educated and should bring a positive impact to the community as well as the society at large through holistic approach of social studies teaching and learning process, which indeed is 21st century clarion call to social studies educators.

### **Recommendations**

The teaching of sex education is a whole responsibility of both parents and teachers as it is an important form of social service and corrects the misconception about the subject matter. Therefore, Social Studies educators should continually ensure the use of a holistic approach in teaching sexuality education in schools without prejudice as problem solvers.

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