



## **Variables Militating against Attitude of Parents towards the Teaching of Sex Education in Secondary Schools in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study is to investigate variables militating against attitude of parents towards the teaching of sex education in secondary schools in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. To achieve these purpose two null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. A detailed review of literature was carried out according to the variables of the study. The study adopted a survey research design. Simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the eight communities, while systematic random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the three hundred and nineteen (319) respondents used for the study. A structured questionnaire was the instrument used for data analysis. The instrument was validated by relevant personnel. To test the hypotheses formulated for the study, simple linear regression statistical tools and independent t-test analysis were used for data analysis. The result obtained from analysis of data and testing of hypotheses in the study revealed that there was a significant influence of cultural beliefs and religion on attitude of parents towards teaching of sex education in secondary schools in the study area. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that parents and caregiver should encourage open and honest discussions with their children about sex education, taking into account their age and maturity level, and also collaborate with educators should develop sex education curricula that are inclusive, comprehensive, and culturally sensitive.

*Keywords: Attitude of Parents, Teaching of Sex Education, Cultural Belief of Parents Religion of Parent*

### **Introduction**

Sex education plays a significant role in the development of adolescent attitudes towards a healthy sexual relations and avoidance of negative sexual consequences. Despite this, the role of parents as agents to promote child's development cannot be underrated in the society. Haffner (2017) reports that for sexuality education to be effectively taught in schools, parents must give their full support as the education of the child include cooperation of the parents. Sexuality education involves more than sexual development and reproductive health. It includes inter-personal relationship, intimacy, body language, values and gender influences (Sieswerda & Blekkaenhorst, 2016). However, the home is the first contact a child has, which provide

opportunities for discussion of sex and sexuality education, making parents the primary sex educators of their children (Siecus, 2017).

Attitude could be positive, negative or neutral. Any concept that specifies an individual's feeling of likeness or dislike to anything is termed his/her attitude towards that concept. Attitude can be a method, disposition, feeling or condition in respect of an individual or object, particularly of the mind (Okang, 2019). The attitude of parents towards the teaching of sex education can either be positive or negative. These attitude can be influenced by various factors within and outside the parents. For instance, the educational background of an individual can determine to a large extent, the person's understanding and perception of any phenomenon. Educated parents are likely in a position to understand the importance of exposing teenagers to sexuality education. The attitude of these categories of parents is likely going to be more positive as compared to parents who are not educated.

Education is a complex and multifaceted concept that has evolved over time. It is essential for individual and societal development, providing numerous benefits, including economic growth, social mobility, and personal development (World Bank, 2018). As our understanding of education continues to evolve, it is essential that we prioritize education as a fundamental human right. Education is defined as "the process of teaching or learning, especially in a school or university" (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). However, this definition is narrow and does not capture the complexity of education. A more comprehensive definition is provided by UNESCO (2019), which states that education is "a process of learning in which knowledge, skills, and values are transmitted from one generation to the next".

George (2019) argued that the cultural disposition of a parent could be largely responsible for his/her perception and attitude towards the teaching of sex education in schools. Most cultures see sex education as a forbidden concept that should not be discussed in the presence of children. The belief is that it exposes children to immorality and promiscuity. Parents with strong cultural affiliation or belief will always resist the temptation of discussing sexuality with teenagers before

they grow into adulthood. The stronger the cultural beliefs of parents, the more likely their attitude towards the teaching of sex education will be negative and vice versa.

Obi (2018) views religion as another influential variable that could determine the attitude of parents towards the teaching of sex education in schools. Depending on their religious affiliation, some parents see discussions centred on sex education among teenagers as a sin and an exposure to immorality. Such thoughts prompts these parents to frown at the idea that sex education should be taught to their children. The conflicting views among various religions on the issue of sexuality and sex education have created a divide among parents with regards to the teaching of sex education. As a result, religion has potentials to significantly influence the attitude of parents towards the teaching of sex education.

### **Cultural belief of parent and teaching of sex education**

Culture could be seen as that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habit acquired by man as a member of the society. Culture also means the totality of human life. Some basic characteristics of culture is shared, some could be learned and not generally transferred. Cultural mode of behavior is learned through the process of socialization in the society and within the family (Edward, 2016). Sexuality is not an isolated phenomenon it covers norms and the cultural values of each community e.g. marriage practice among these factors analyzed, sexual education is concern with traditional values regarding sexuality, and the status of women as well as religions norms and values as all traits of culture.

Society and cultural environment play a significant role in shaping individual perceptions and expressions of sexuality. Every culture communicates its unique set of norms, taboos, and expectations surrounding sexuality, resulting in diverse sexual ethics. What is deemed acceptable in one culture may be rejected or stigmatized in another. For instance, issues like masturbation, homosexuality, premarital and extramarital relationships are evaluated differently across cultures (Campbell, 2018).

Culture is one of the factors that hinder sexuality education in secondary schools. Every cultural group endeavours to transmit its culture to its younger generation. The domain of culture is extremely varied covering not only physical objects but also language, customs, skills, attitudes and beliefs which are transmitted from generation to generation by social contact (Anastasi 2019). In the same way, Alessandri, (2020) sees culture to comprise variables like beliefs, norms, values and the likes which shapes the life of an individual in a particular society, acquired through contact with socialite like parents, peers and other members of the society. Cultural values may be defined as the symbolic relationship, which hold together a given society. In line with above, Shuffle (2019) views beliefs and values of a child as something that cannot be easily changed by the teacher because they are personal and complex.

In Nigerian society, sexual behaviour has traditionally been viewed as appropriate only among marriage partners, consequently, all forms of sexual behaviour have been discouraged among children and adolescents (Akpan, 2017). To achieve sexuality control dominant norms prescribed chastity prior to the wedding and fidelity afterwards. Davis (2016) asserts that societies allow sexuality problem to interfere with the engendering and enhancement of children to a limited degree. By making marital sexuality normatively superior to all forms of non-marital sexual activity, these forms are structurally constrained in their potential threats to marriage. Mmaduakonam and Nwankwo (2019) realized that in Nigeria, sexual expression was a taboo especially for the young. It was rarely talked about but whenever it was absolutely necessary to be discussed, it was done in the most secretive and reluctant manner.

Mobolaji and Onyekeze (2018) recognized that in the Nigerian culture, premarital sexual relationship is discouraged and indeed forbidden. Hence, relationship between a young man and woman during courtship is usually guided and closely supervised by their parents and relations. Conger (2013) realized that a culture influences adolescent sexuality. The author was of the view that a culture may be restrictive with regard to sexual activity throughout childhood, adolescence and even to some extent in adulthood. The author reported that among the Cuba of North West Coast of South America, children remain ignorant of sexual matters (as far as adult information is

concerned) until the last stages of the marriage ceremony. Kumekpor (2018) observed that it is a taboo in traditional communities to bluntly discuss anything concerning sexual matters with children before certain age. Durojaiye (1976) reported that African adolescent school children achieve maturity at the age of 12 - 13. Until they leave the sixth form at 20 or 21 and even while at the university, they are forbidden from indulging in sexual intercourse or relationships.

Teachers of sex education feel uncomfortable to efficiently and effectively teach it due to the simple reason that it is against the culture of the people to talk and discuss sex and sensitive organs of the human person openly. In nearly every Nigeria society, due to cultural belief, pre-marital sexual relationship is forbidden, open discussion are bottled-up or suppressed, this no doubt affects the instruction or effective teaching of sex education (Adunola, 2020). Sex education is understood and seen as a taboo to be talked about even by teachers because of cultural standard, norms and tradition. This is due to the societal perception that the teaching of sexual issues is unethical. Thus, instruction in sex education would make the child too familiar with sexual issues and be exposed too early to sexual intercourse and sexual relationship. Sex education was received with mixed feelings when it was introduced in schools in 2002. Its introduction in schools was not well received by the people in northern Nigeria. It thus, created raging controversy particularly in Northern Nigeria (Akande & Akande, 2017).

### **Religion of parents and teaching of sex education**

Religion continues to masquerade as a formidable challenge to the successful and effective implementation of sex education in Nigeria. While Christianity is understood to be less rigid and greatly flexible to societal change, Islam is very unyielding and not friendly to any issue whose subject is in disagreement with its ideas (Adepoju, 2017). The notion of boys intermixing with girls, or man mixing with women, partial nude dressing and assertiveness of the female folks is extremely frowned or glared at by Islam (Laumann, 2017). Christianity and Islam are of the view that sex education is not important to the Nigerian society (Adunola, 2018). The mere mention of the word “sex” evoke sentiment with regard to teaching the youths in secondary schools. This is because religions generally and African cultures regard such word “sex” as a taboo and as such they shy or

back away from mentioning them. However, subjects like Biology, Health Science or Health Education are more acceptable and palatable to most traditional background.

Okeke (2019) reported that parents often say they do not want to discuss sexuality with their teens for they are afraid that in-depth discussion will appear a license to take pleasure in sexual behaviours. So if parents have that fear, what more of the situation in a classroom with peers and different persons with different socio-cultural, ethnic/tribal and religious background? The adherence to a specific religious moral code can mold a sex education curriculum. For example, religions that view marriage as a sacrament may adhere to sexual education that discourages sex before marriage or abstinence-only based curriculums. More liberal cultures may discuss non-monogamous sex and take a more objective stance on pre-marital sex. Smith (2017) revealed that sex education has long been a source of anxiety for parents, especially those with strong religious beliefs. Many parents want to ensure the curriculum does not undermine their moral and religious views. But does that conflict with the student's right to information about sexual health? What topics should be covered? When?

Due to the intrinsic complexities of human sexuality, the physical aspects of biological reproduction cannot be separated from moral responsibility. Regardless of whether children receive sex education in schools or even at church, it remains the parents' responsibility to ensure their children are properly educated about both the biological and moral aspects of sexuality. Leaving values-training to others is dangerous, particularly regarding matters of sexuality in many cultures today (Jake, 2018). First, what does the Bible say about sex? Sexuality is a gift to us from God and should be viewed as such. God created sex for two purposes: procreation and unity between husband and wife (Genesis 1:28; Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:7-8; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5). Any other use of sex is sin (1 Corinthians 6:9, 18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3). Sadly, many in our world do not believe these truths. As a result, there are many perversions of sexuality and much unnecessary pain caused by them. Parents who properly educate their children about sex can help their children discern truth from error, walk in wisdom, and ultimately have a more wholesome experience of the gift of sexuality (Manix, 2019).

Many parents find the topic of sexuality awkward and embarrassing, but it doesn't need to be. Parents should begin when the children are very young, speaking as a matter-of-fact, with preschoolers about their bodies and how men and women are made differently. Those conversations transition naturally into more complex areas as the child matures. It is important that a child knows he/she can talk to mom or dad about anything that confuses him/her. Sexual information bombards us from every direction, so these parent-child conversations must begin very early. Before parents allow a school system to instruct in sexuality or morality, they must be sure their children have already learned the truth. It is then crucial to stay abreast of what the children are learning and how they are applying their knowledge. Keeping a constant, open dialogue with one's children is a key to staying in charge of what they are learning. When parents are proactive in their children's instruction, those children have a basis upon which to recognize and reject errors that the world promotes as truth (Ejukwa, 2019).

There has been a significant push in some conservative circles to emphasize abstinence in sex education curricula in public schools. Some evangelical churches have encouraged parents to have their teenagers pledge premarital chastity, symbolized by a purity ring, as a reminder of their commitment. Historically, the Old Testament viewed premarital sex as a violation of a father's right to sell his daughter in marriage as a virgin. The offender was required to pay compensation to the father for damaging his property. In contrast, the New Testament condemns pornography and fornication. Christians are encouraged to avoid fornication at all costs and to maintain their moral purity (Farah, 2019).

Most religions view human sexuality as divinely granted, capable of bringing joy and harm. While faith traditions address its meaning and expression, diversity leads to varying attitudes towards sex education, resulting in different sexual value systems that influence individuals' understanding and feelings about sexuality. A particular Christian perspective on sexuality has deeply influenced contemporary cultural attitude and public policies regarding sexual issues including sexuality education. Onwusogbulu (2016) is of the view that religious leaders never talk openly about sexual matters and if at all they do, they never get into details. Religious institutions

condemn sexuality education of Adolescent. The author realized that on the religion, discussing issues about sexuality was considered testament to a sin.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors influencing the attitude of parents towards the teaching of sex education in secondary schools in Boki Local Government Area. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Assess the influence of cultural beliefs on the attitude of parents towards the teaching of sex education in secondary schools.
2. Ascertain the influence of religion on the attitude of parents towards the teaching of sex education in secondary schools.

### **Statement of hypotheses**

1. There is no significant influence of cultural belief of parents towards the teaching of sex education in secondary schools.
2. Religion of parent does not significantly influence the teaching of sex education in secondary schools.

### **Research design and methods**

The study adopted the survey research design. This is because it investigates the phenomena as it exists as at the time of investigation. The population of this study comprised of parents whose children are in secondary schools in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State. A sample of three hundred and nineteen (319) respondents was randomly selected from eight communities in the study area using simple random sampling technique. The instrument used for data collection is a structured questionnaire titled “Variables Militating against Attitude of Parents on the Teaching of Sex Education Questionnaire (VMAPTSEQ)”. It is divided into two parts. Part A contains items on respondents’ personal variables, while Part B was developed using four point modified scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). It contained fifteen items measuring variables of the study. Items 1-5 measured parent’s cultural belief, items 6-10

measured parents' religion while items 11-15 measured attitude of parents towards the teaching of sex education in secondary schools.

**Results and discussion**

Table 1: Simple linear regression analysis of the influence of cultural beliefs and attitude of parents on the teaching of sex education in secondary schools in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State (N = 319)

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	Std error of estimate		
1	.462*	.431	.427	2.77383		
Model	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig	
Regression	374.488	1	374.488	44.624	.000	
Residual	1725.360	317	12.364			
Total	2099.848	318				

The result of analysis of data presented on table 1 shows that the independent or predictor variable (cultural beliefs) have a significant influence on the dependent or predicted variable (attitude of parents towards teaching of sex education) in secondary school in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State. This implied that cultural beliefs significantly influence attitude of parents towards teaching of sex education in secondary schools in the study area.

Hypothesis two

Religion does not significantly influence attitude of parents towards the teaching of sex education in secondary schools. The independent variable in this hypothesis is religion while the dependent variable is attitude of parents towards teaching of sex education in secondary schools. Independent t-test statistical tool was employed for data analysis. The result of this analysis is presented on table 2.

Table 2: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of religion on attitude of parents towards teaching of sex education in secondary schools in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State

Religion	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Cal.t	P.value
Christianity	156	25.9614	1.1313		
				14.736*	0.000
Traditional Religion	163	23.9643	1.2694		

\*Significant at 0.05; df = 317

The result of analysis presented on table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 14.736 is higher than the p. value of 0.000 at 0.05 level of significance with 317 degree of freedom. This implies that the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant influence of religion on attitude of parents towards teaching of sex education in secondary school in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State.

### **Discussion of findings**

The finding obtained from analysis of data and testing of hypothesis one in the study revealed that the null hypothesis was rejected. The implication of this finding is that there is a significant influence of cultural beliefs on attitude of parents towards teaching of sex education in secondary schools in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State. The reason for this finding could be that cultural norms and values are very influential in making certain decisions in life. The way a particular group in the society view things is very important. The culture of the study area sees sex education as ritual for promoting promiscuity among students and teenagers in particular. It is believed that exposing children to sex education will destroy their morality and encourage barbaric behaviour among children. As a result, sex education is considered a taboo among the elders of the study area and they will resist any effort aimed at exposing children to sex education.

The finding of this study is in agreement with that of Edward (2016) who revealed culture as a complex whole encompassing knowledge, beliefs, morals, laws, customs, and capabilities

acquired through societal membership. Culture shapes human behavior, including sexuality, which is influenced by community norms, values, and traditions, such as marriage practices, sexual education, and religious norms. The finding of this study also supported that of Alessandri (2020) who revealed that culture consists of variables like beliefs, norms, and values that shape an individual's life in a society, acquired through social interactions. Cultural values are symbolic relationships that unite a society. In the same vein, Shuffle (2019), revealed that a child's beliefs and values are deeply personal and complex, making them difficult for teachers to change.

The finding obtained from analysis of data and testing of hypothesis two in the study revealed that the null hypothesis was rejected. The implication of this finding is that there is a significant influence of religion on attitude of parents towards teaching of sex education in secondary schools in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State. The reason for this finding could be that parents who are members of the Christian family see sex education as an introduction to sin among teenagers. They emphasize that the teaching of sex education will significantly expose children to information they should not have access to. They believe that when the children grow up, they will be able to access the necessary information that would enable them make informed decision with regards to their sexuality. Parents from traditional religion are usually not against children having access to sex education because they do not see it as a sin. This varying views account for the influence of religion on the teaching of sex education in the study area.

The finding of this study is in agreement with that of Farah (2019) who reported that conservative groups and evangelical churches have promoted abstinence in sex education, with some encouraging teenagers to pledge premarital chastity, symbolized by purity rings. Historically, the Old Testament viewed premarital sex as a property violation, while the New Testament condemns pornography and fornication, encouraging Christians to maintain moral purity. The finding of this study also supported that of Onwusogbulu (2016) who revealed that religious leaders rarely discuss sexual matters openly and in detail. Instead, many religious institutions condemn sexuality education for adolescents, viewing discussions about sexuality as sinful.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate and present findings on variables militating against attitude of parents towards the teaching of sex education in secondary schools in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. The findings obtained from analysis of data and testing of hypotheses in the study revealed that there was a significant influence of cultural belief and religion on attitude of parents on the teaching of sex education in secondary schools in the study area.

## **Recommendations for policy directions**

Based on the findings obtained from analysis of data and testing of hypotheses in the study, it was recommended that:

- I. Parents and caregiver should encourage open and honest discussions with their children about sex education, taking into account their age and maturity level, and also collaborate with educators should develop sex education curricula that are inclusive, comprehensive, and culturally sensitive.
- II. Religious leaders should encourage open discussions about sex education within your community, and also provide guidance on how religious teachings relate to sex education and relationships. They should collaborate with educators to ensure sex education is taught in a way that respects your community's religious values.

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