



COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES AS AN ANTIDOTE TO UNHEALTHY LIVING PRACTICES AMONG RURAL DWELLERS IN OYIGBO LGA IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined Community Education Programmes as Antidote to Unhealthy Living Practices among Rural Dwellers in Oyigbo Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consists of rural inhabitants of Oyigbo Local Government Area of Rivers State. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select a sample size of two hundred (200) respondents. Three research questions guided the study. A structured questionnaire titled "Community Education Programmes as an Antidote to Unhealthy Living Practices among Rural Dwellers Questionnaire (CEAULPQ)" was used as instrument for data collection. The reliability coefficient is 0.97. The data collected were analyzed using weighted means. The findings showed that literacy, skills acquisition, health education and enlightenment programmes are the main community education programmes going on in the community. Based on these findings the study recommended, amongst others, that, to prevent and cure unhealthy living practices among the dwellers in these rural communities, literacy education which comprises basic and post literacy education as well as socio-economic, environmental and health education, needs to be adequately provided.

KEYWORDS: Community Education, Programmes, Antidote, Unhealthy Living Practices, Rural Dwellers.

INTRODUCTION

Community Education has a solution role in the society, which mostly aids the development of any nation and the expansion of an individual's educational opportunity, thereby ensuring a literate society. This is the reason why modernization theorists such as (Bhola and Oduaran, 2006) argued that for meaningful development to take place in any nation, the subjects of that nation must be literate. In other words, the subjects must be literate and liberated to rise up to their own personal development and the nation at large. No development can take place in any nation without starting from the grass root which is the rural communities (Oladapo, 2013). The realization of the crucial role that the rural areas play in the overall development of the whole society, and the role of adult education in the development process, has made the education of the rural populace a matter of urgent attention. Community Education as a phenomenon had been used by several developed countries of the world such as Germany, Italy, United Kingdom and France to combat mass illiteracy, health and sanitation problems, as well as agricultural problems.

To Kobani and Alozie (2019) it needs be noted, however, that community development in contemporary times has gone beyond the traditional role of improving the social, economic and physical conditions of individuals to include improvement in the emotional and psychological dispositions of community members with or without external help and relying mostly on local initiative, leadership and resources. Developing countries especially Nigeria is still faced with the problem of rural illiteracy with an estimate of 63 million adult illiterates at the grass roots level and this has served as a nuisance to holistic development. Nigeria has seven hundred and seventy-four (774) Local Government Areas and each of them still have rural communities with some issues of proper basic education.

Community education also plays a major role in social development and it is now widely admitted that growth will not reduce poverty unless poor people are able to actively participate in it and such participation can become



effective to a large extent through adult education. The Nigerian population needs some kind of formal and non-formal education and training to be able to benefit from basic health-care services which also entails the development of new medicines. They will be in a position to free themselves from diseases that devastate poor people, such as tuberculosis, malaria, typhoid, cholera etc. Community education is also needed to enable the poor in the Nigerian society to really take advantage of programmes aimed at protecting orphans and vulnerable children. According to Kobani and Alozie (2016) some degree of education is necessary for the adult to be able to effectively perform the roles expected from him or her by the society.

It is worthy-to-note that a child first learns from the mother before any other member of the family or the society. A child cannot learn so much from an illiterate and uneducated or ignorant mother. Anokwu (2018) agrees that to raise children who have strong literacy skills the parents need to be literate. Learning to read begins long before a child enters school. It begins when parents read to their children, buy their children books, and encourage their children to read. It is a noteworthy fact that as mothers and home builders, women are the first teachers that children have. In a similar way, a critical factor in community development is the nobility of character of the individuals who make up the community. Therefore, the connection between women education and community development lies in the inner sustaining impetus which women can provide by their special nature and which serve as vital supplement to physical developments. No form of development is sustainable without the human character component which is best provided by women (Kobani, 2018).

Community education is a vital medium through which adults in rural communities can have access to basic education. Community education is regarded as all forms of learning programmes, in which adults participate in order to develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge and improve their technical or professional qualifications to enable them meet their needs and those of the society. It is stressed that, it is a transmission process of general technical or vocational knowledge in the area of health, agricultural and other sectors, as well as acquisition of skilled values, and attitudes, which takes place in and out of the formal education system with the view to cater for early education deficiencies of mature people and enhancing their self-fulfillment and active participation in social, economic and political life of the society.

Udomoh (2017) added that understanding a doctor's orders, calculating how much medicine to take, reading disease prevention pamphlets are ways adults can keep themselves and their families healthy. Unfortunately, millions of rural dwellers, especially adults, lack these essential literacy skills that increases the health care cost in the country. Once Community Education is achieved in a community, by the provision of educational opportunities for all categories of learners which promotes the development of their critical thinking skills as an individual, which however in turn leads to problem solving and raising the individual's level of consciousness politically and socially, a better and healthier community is always achieved. Jefries (1967) maintains that there is a clear correlation between adult literacy and crime. More than 60 percent of persons in correctional centers in the country did not graduate from secondary school or can be classified as low-literate. This enhances economic independence for effective contribution of individuals in the development of themselves and the nation at large. The scope of Community Education is very broad as it encompasses all areas of human endeavours. Community education functions to foster the development of a planetary consciousness that will enable us to function as global citizens and to transform the present human conditions by changing societal structures. It has been identified as a part of life long education and it brings about appropriate development in communities.

Health Practices as well as work habits improve when rural dwellers become very knowledgeable. According to Amirize in Kobani and Alozie (2019) Development as a humanistic process, should show concern for the well-being of all sectors and people in society. It should involve transformation of the total living conditions and environment of the people. This means that oppressive and suppressive conditions which make it difficult for people to develop and actualize their potentials should be done away with. To Kobani (2014) Development is a co-operative effort of many, by its nature, will always be on-going, even when basic goals are met, people will always try to improve the quality of their lives. Development efforts however, should be sustainable.

The lessons learnt and the experiences acquired in this process are passed on to future generations, enabling them to improve their capacities to make further valuable changes in their inter-human relations and their ability to transform nature.

The scope of Community education includes all forms of programmes that are meant to contribute immensely and positively to the development and understanding of Adults in general. This entails programmes that will gear and awake Adults from their slumber, programmes that will activate them and make them see and measure their situations, take decisions and be eager to implement the decisions they take. A serious, active, conscious, sensitive and organized government will never neglect rural communities because it may bring about negative



consequences such as; exodus of rural dwellers to urban areas, with resulting problems of unemployment, crimes and vices, prostitution, child labour and insecurities. To avoid any negative effects which may stem from the neglect of rural communities, Community Education is to be a vital medium through which people in rural communities can have access to education and ensure better living of its dwellers.

In analyzing the concepts of Healthy Living, health is the greatest asset any individual, family or nation at large can boast of. Without it, economic interactions and even education within a family and society as well, can be affected. A healthy being is a condition in which the individual is able to mobilize all of his/her intellectual, emotional, and physical resources for optimal living. It improves personal efficiency and facilitates the attainment of personal goals.

Okafor in Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2014), pointed out that more than ever before, efforts are now seriously being made to maintain a healthy life. It is said that your health is your responsibility. You are the only person who can make the life-style decisions that contributes to your wellness. Female genital mutilation harms girls' bodies, dims their futures, and endangers their lives," said Catherine Russell, UNICEF Executive Director was a worrying trend. Some 640 million girls and women living today were married as children, and at least 200 million girls and women have been subjected to Female Genital Mutilation (UNICEF, 2023).

Harmful cultural practices of child marriages and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) are terrible discriminatory practices committed regularly over such long periods of time of which some societies have begun to see them as acceptable practices, however robbing the girls of their childhood and denying them the chance to determine their own future.

Unhealthy practices, especially the traditional based ones seen in rural settlements are most times culture-based negative practices. These negative practices which are seen as norms in rural communities are most times targeted against women, children and especially the Girl-Child. These harmful practices are numerous, for instance, patronising quack doctors for treatment when one is ill and letting the illness get out of hand before deciding to go to the hospital. Similarly, the jungle justice approach of resolving issues of which a severe damage could be done before the truth is being revealed due to hasty conclusions. Oladapo (2010) stressed that people must be aware of their rights in order to assert them. Education and enlightenment gives people access to that information. Community education plays a significant role in reducing gender, race, nationality, and religious inequality that favour groups over another in access to education, property, employment, health care, legal, and civic participation.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The issues of unhealthy living and its ignorance in Nigeria has so much worsened that the hope of survival of rural dwellers as regards qualitative standard of living is fast diminishing. The access to basic education owing to ignorance, poverty and non availability of enough schools, educational programmes and centers is still on the rise which has contributed to high rate of rural illiteracy in Nigeria. Healthy attitudes and life styles which will raise the quality of life are still not available in most rural communities in Nigeria, owing to illiteracy. This makes rural dwellers to be susceptible to endemic diseases, poor state of growth and general development at large. The problem of this study therefore, is to explore, through empirical procedures, if Community education programmes can help ameliorate the problem of unhealthy living practices among rural dwellers in Oyigbo LGA in Rivers state, Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What are the types of Community education programmes available in rural areas of Oyigbo LGA that will aid as preventive and curative measures of unhealthy living practices?
- ii. Do Community education programmes provide technical and professional sustainable incomes for rural dwellers to aid healthy living?
- iii. Can Community education programmes bring about the right attitude and behaviour in individuals for full personal development that will aid healthy living?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population comprised the rural dwellers in Oyigbo Local Government Area of Rivers State. A total of two hundred (200) respondents were selected for this study using simple random sampling technique. The research instrument used for data collection was a researcher developed questionnaire titled "Community Education Programmes as an Antidote to Unhealthy Living Practices



among Rural Dwellers Questionnaire (CEAULPQ)”. The reliability of the instrument was 0.97. Data collected was analyzed using weighted means.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1: What are the types of Community education programmes available in rural areas of Oyigbo LGA that will aid as preventive and curative measures of unhealthy living practices?

Table 1

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	MEAN	Remark
1.	Literacy education;	78 (312)	56 (168)	42 (84)	24 (24)	588	2.94	Accepted
2.	Empowerment education through skill acquisition	80 (320)	54 (162)	48 (96)	18 (18)	596	2.98	Accepted
3.	Agricultural education and extension Services	26 (104)	40 (120)	58 (116)	76 (76)	416	2.08	Rejected
4.	Health Education and Enlightenment Programmes	80 (320)	56 (168)	47 (94)	17 (17)	599	2.96	Accepted
5.	Sensitization against Harmful Cultural Practices (Female genital Mutilation, child marriage, girl-child discrimination etc.)	16 (64)	46 (138)	57 (114)	81 (81)	397	1.96	Rejected

Table 1 shows that the respondents agreed that the community education programmes taking place in their areas are: literacy education, empowerment through skill acquisition, health education and enlightenment programmes. These items have 2.94, 2.98 and 2.96 respectively as their means; which are greater than 2.50 - the criterion mean. However, they disagreed with the options suggesting that Agricultural education and sensitization against harmful cultural practices are ongoing in their area. These options have means of 2.08 and 1.96 respectively. These means are lower than 2.50 – the criterion mean.

Research Question 2: Do Community education programmes provide technical and professional sustainable incomes for rural dwellers to aid healthy living?

Table 2

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	MEAN	Remark
6.	Community Education provides technical and professional competences for rural dwellers to be gainfully employed.	79 (316)	58 (174)	43 (86)	20 (20)	596	2.98	Accepted
7.	Community Education enhances the capacity of rural dwellers to contribute to the socio-economic and cultural development of the community.	82 (328)	60 (180)	42 (84)	16 (16)	608	3.04	Accepted
8.	Empowerment programmes have helped to provide sustainable livelihoods for many families.	80 (320)	57 (171)	40 (80)	23 (23)	594	2.97	Accepted
9.	Community Education involves tools that help people move out of poverty and better support themselves and their families.	78 (312)	62 (186)	50 (100)	10 (10)	608	3.04	Accepted
10.	Community education empowers rural dwellers with skills needed for the storage and preservation of farm produce.	81 (324)	63 (189)	45 (90)	11 (11)	614	3.07	Accepted



Table 2 shows that the respondents accepted that: Community Education provides technical and professional competences for rural dwellers to be gainfully employed. It enhances the capacity of rural dwellers to contribute to the socio-economic and cultural development of the community. They accepted that empowerment programmes have helped to provide sustainable livelihoods for many families; involves tools that help people move out of poverty and better support themselves and their families; and also empowers rural dwellers with skills needed for the storage and preservation of farm produce. Each of their means – 2.98, 3.04, 2.97, 3.04 and 3.07 respectively is greater than 2.50 – the criterion mean.

Research Question 3: Can Community education programmes bring about the right attitude and behaviour in individuals for full personal development that will aid healthy living?

Table 3

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	MEAN	Remark
11.	Community Education has helped towards the personality development of rural dwellers.	84 (336)	58 (174)	38 (76)	20 (20)	606	3.03	Accepted
12.	Health Education empowers rural dwellers to take actions that will keep themselves and their families healthy.	78 (312)	62 (186)	46 (92)	14 (14)	604	3.02	Accepted
13.	Community Education can help towards crime reduction especially from those classified as low-literate.	79 (316)	60 (180)	50 (100)	11 (11)	607	3.04	Accepted
14.	Community Education has empowered people to treat others with love and care.	82 (328)	56 (168)	48 (96)	14 (14)	606	3.03	Accepted
15.	Literacy Education can help in reducing gender, race, or other considerations that favours one group over another in access to education, property etc.	87 (312)	64 (192)	44 (88)	14 (14)	606	3.03	Accepted

Table 3 shows that the options that Community Education has helped towards the personality development of rural dwellers; Health Education empowers rural dwellers to take actions that will keep themselves and their families healthy; Community Education can help towards crime reduction especially from those classified as low-literate; Community Education has empowered people to treat others with love and care; and that Literacy Education can help in reducing gender, race, or other considerations that favours one group over another in access to education, property etc. were accepted by the respondents. Each of their means – 3.03, 3.02, 3.04, 3.03 and 3.03 respectively is greater than 2.50 – the criterion mean.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study established the fact that literacy education, empowerment through skill acquisition and health education and enlightenment programmes are the major Community education programmes that exist in the Local Government Area; while agricultural extension and sensitization programmes against harmful cultural practices are not so visible.

The study also established that Community Education provides technical and professional competences for rural dwellers to be gainfully employed and enhance their capacity for sustainable livelihoods. The literacy programme has empowered the people for personal development and placed them in the right position to be able to make valuable contributions to the socio-economic, cultural, political and health development of the community. This finding agrees with Jefries (2019) who stated that Community education programmes for adult learners should enable them contribute meaningfully to the empowerment of their society. Community education enhances economic independence for effective contribution of individuals in the development of themselves and the nation at large. The scope of Community Education is very broad as it encompasses all areas of human endeavours. Community education functions to foster the development of a planetary consciousness that will enable us to function as global citizens and to transform the present human conditions by changing societal structures.

The findings also established that community education programmes has impacted positively on the living habits of the people. that Community Education has helped towards the personality development of rural dwellers; empowered them to take actions that will keep themselves and their families healthy; literacy education particularly has helped in crime reduction, empowered people to treat others with love and care; has helped to



reduce gender or other considerations that favours one group over another in access to education, property etc. This is in agreement with Imhabekhai (2009), who opined that the desire and ability to read, write and compute materials in vocation will motivate the learners for better participation, and enhance their inter-personal skills. It also agrees with Oladapo (2010) that people must be aware of their rights in order to assert them. Education and enlightenment gives people access to that information. Community education plays a significant role in reducing gender, race, nationality, and religious inequality that favours a group over another in access to education, property, employment, health care, legal, and civic participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings above, the researcher recommends the following:

- Government, at all levels, should ensure that literacy education, which comprises of basic and post literacy education as well as empowerment and health education, is provided in the right quality and quantity so as to prevent the possibility of participants relapsing to illiteracy and unhealthy living standards.
- The Ministry of Agriculture, both at the state and national levels, should undertake in agricultural education and extension services in the area to ensure the people reap maximally from the benefits of these programmes.
- State and National Orientation Agency should consider targeting the people in the area of research with sensitization on harmful cultural practices to mitigate against practices that hinder the development of the the girl-child
- Oil companies should invest more in community education programmes as part of their corporate social responsibility to the people.
- Non-Governmental and Christian Based Organizations should incorporate aspects of community education in their intervention activities in these communities.
- Advocacy and sensitization programmes should be in community appropriate languages and in their localities to increase acceptance, assimilation and effectiveness.

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