

The impact of health education in improving a healthy life style of primary school pupils in Awka urban area of Anambra state

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Abstract

It has been alleged that despite the rich curricular provision of health education in Nigerian primary schools, the pupil's healthy life style is still a major problem confronting our society. This study therefore, investigated the impact of health education in improving the healthy life style of primary school pupils in Awka urban Area of Anambra State. Survey research design was used for the study. 1200 primary six pupils constituted the population out of which a proportionate random sampling of 20% of primary six pupils was used. This gave rise to sample population of 240 primary six pupils. Questionnaire tagged "Questionnaire on Healthy Life Style" (QHLS) was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that effective teaching of health education in primary schools in Awka urban area, improved the healthy life style of the pupils. Based on this finding the researchers recommended that the government both state and federal should through the Ministry of Education organize annually capacity building workshops and conferences for primary school teachers on improved teaching methods for teaching health education in primary schools for a sustainable development of a healthy lifestyle among primary school pupils.

Keywords: Health, education, schools, primary, lifestyle.

1. Introduction

Health education is a very important subject taught in primary schools. It is very important because it centers on the principles of maintaining human health and this is inculcated into the children from a very young age. The aim of health education is not only to increase the child's health knowledge and to create positive attitudes towards the child's well-being but also to promote healthy behaviour.

There are multiple definitions of health education. Health education can be defined as the profession of educating people about health ^[1]. The joint committee on health education and promotion terminology ^[2] defined health education as any combination of planned learning experiences based on sound theories that provide individuals, groups and communities the opportunity to acquire information and the skills needed to make quality health decisions. In other words health education is all about learning how individuals and group of people tend to behave in a way to promote their health.

Health education involves classroom instruction that addresses the physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions of health, develops health knowledge, attitudes and skills and is tailored to each age level of pupils. health education is designed to motivate and assist students to maintain and improve their health, prevent diseases and reduce health related risk behaviours ^[3]. The teachings on how to promote children's and young people's physical and emotional health take place in a schools setting. ^[4] believe that quality health education programs delivered in schools can improve the life of the children.

In addition, health education programmes in schools can contribute directly to a child's ability to successfully adopt and practice behaviours that protect and promote health and avoid or reduce health risk. The healthy life style of the primary school children is not by chance but should be a planned

outcome. It should be a case of well designed, well-resourced and sustained health education in the nation's primary school's curriculum. Such healthy life style of primary school children should be achieved through quality health education taught by qualified teachers with improved teaching methods. Schools play an important role at this crucial stage of the child. The ^[5] and ^[6] opined that the schools that provide a place of enjoyment and peace is more likely to produce children with enhanced outcomes in both health and education.

The World Health Organization WHO) in 1986 (introduced the concept of health promoting school, HPS). A health promoting school is a place where all members of the school community work together to promote children with integrated and positive experiences, culture and structure which promote and protect their health. It is easier and less costly to keep the children healthy than to fix preventable health problems later in life.

In support of the above, ^[4] posits that, school health education can reduce health risk behaviours such as tobacco use, poor nutrition lack of physical activity, drug and alcohol use as well as action that increase stress, and risk of injury and violence. Since these behaviours are amenable to change, quality school health education taught by trained and certified health educators provides the best opportunity to promote positive health behaviour among children and adolescents.

There is a strong relationship between school health education and health literacy. Health literacy is all about the ability of an individual to learn, interpret and understand basic health information and services in ways which are health enhancing. School health education provides the fundamental basis for instilling behaviours into young pupils to prevent or delay the onset of the leading causes of death in our country ^[7]. In support of the above fact, ^[4] emphasized that promoting and establishing healthy behaviours for young people are more effective, and often easier, than efforts to change unhealthy

behaviours already established in adult. In other words it is important to find better ways to provide quality school health education that will improve health and save life.

Most experts agree that education about issues like alcohol abuse is most effective if it begins at least two years before the behaviour is likely to start. This means that children eight and nine year old are not too young to learn about the danger of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs and that sexuality education also needs to be part of the experiences of primary school pupils. It is at this tender age that children learn skills they will use to make healthy choices through out their lifetime.

In Nigeria a school health policy has been put in place. This is because of a deep concern on the part of the government, communities and other agencies, for the overall well-being of members of the community especially the children. Without proper health, education is not possible. If the learners are healthy, then their minds will be more receptive to learning. As a result the school health policy seeks to put in place adequate facilities, resources and programmes, which guarantee physical and mental, safety and security of the school community to promote learning. The broad goals of the school health policy include among others to:

- Raise the awareness of the education sector to the value of implementing an effective school health, hygiene and nutrition programmes as one of its strategies to achieve the goals of education.
- Continue to improve the quality of health of members of the school community (pupils and staff) as part of the overall national health programme through the control of infectious diseases.
- Promote and encourage positive health knowledge, attitude and practices among pupils and school personnel^[3].

According to^[8] during the health promotion conference held in Lagos in 2004, it was emphasized that the classroom teacher is the key to creating the learning opportunities within and beyond the classrooms and of building pupils future capacities to grow and be productive. Through this, the pupils should accept life-long responsibilities for their health and social behaviour. The development of quality health education program is essential for the pupils to adopt and maintain healthy life style and this should be done at school settings^[8]. These researchers^[9] and^[10] opined that lack of physical activities has led to the continuous increase of the percentage of the children unhealthy life style. This could be improved upon through a well-designed health education curriculum backed up with improved teaching methodology that is practically oriented. In the World Health Organization (WHO)'s information series on school health, a decade of evaluation research indicates three important findings regarding quality school health education programme:

- Health education that concentrates on developing health related skills and imparting health –related knowledge and attitude is more likely to help youths practice health enhancing behaviour.
- Skill development is more likely to result in the desired healthy behaviour when practicing; the skill is tied to the content of a specific health behaviour or health decision.
- The most effective method of skill development is learning by doing – involving the children in active, participatory experience, rather than passive ones^[1]. Health education in primary schools should be pupils involving, it should be

practically based. This will make the pupils to be active learners.

Statement of the Problem

It has been alleged that despite the teaching of health education in primary schools, there is still a high level of unhealthy life styles among the primary school pupils. This becomes worrisome to the researchers; hence this study investigated the impact of health education on improving the healthy life style of the pupils in Awka urban primary schools.

Research Question: How has the teaching of health education improved the healthy life style of primary six pupils in Awka Urban Area of Anambra state.

Methodology

Survey Design was adopted for the study. Reason being that the study sought the opinions of respondents. The study was carried out in all the twenty (20) primary schools in Awka urban area of Anambra State. The population is made up of one thousand two hundred (1200) primary six pupils. Proportionate random sampling technique was used to select 20% of primary six pupils from each school resulting to sampled population of 240 primary six pupils. The reason for using primary six (6) pupils is that they have been in school for at least six years that the teaching of health education would have made an impact on their health life style. Research instrument which was adapted by the researcher, titled Questionnaire for Healthy Life Style (QHLS) was used for collecting data from the pupils. The purpose of the study guided the designing of the questionnaire. Likert four point rating scale was used. Strongly Agreed (SA) 4 point, Agree (A) 3 point, Disagreed (D) 2 point, strongly disagreed (SD) 1 point. A mean of 2.5 and above indicated acceptance and a mean below 2.50 indicated rejection. The instrument was validated by two (2) experts each from Department of Early Childhood Education, and Measurement and Evaluation of University of Nigeria Nsukka. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was determined using Crombach alpha correlation coefficient and a correlation coefficient of 0.89 was obtained. This high correlation coefficient value shows that the instrument was reliable. The data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation

Result

Table 1: The Mean Ratings of Primary six Pupils on how Health Education has improved their Healthy Life Style.

S/N	Question items	mean	SD	Decision
1	Eating a balanced diet makes me healthy	3.9	16.35	Accepted
2	Keeping my personal belongings clean makes me healthy	3.2	9.41	Accepted
3	Hand washing practice with soap makes me healthy	3.4	9.02	Accepted
4	Having a little exercise every day makes me healthy	3.9	8.95	Accepted
5	Living in a clean environment makes me healthy	3.6	10.15	Accepted
6	Taking my siesta after school makes me healthy	3.4	9.51	Accepted
7	Drinking enough water makes me healthy	3.5	9.26	Accepted
8	Brushing my teeth makes me healthy	3.3	10.35	Accepted

Discussion of Findings

The table above shows that all the items were rated high with a mean score of above 2.5. This indicated an agreement by the respondents that effective teaching of health education in primary schools in Awka urban primary schools improved the healthy lifestyle of the pupils.

This finding is in tandem with the views of (4,9,3 and 11,) that health education programs in schools can contribute directly to a student's ability to successfully adopt and practice behaviours that protect and promote health and reduce health risk behaviours. Such risk behaviours as tobacco use, poor nutrition lack of physical activity, drug and alcohol use as well as action that increase stress, and risk of injury and violence could be controlled. For the facts that these behaviours are amenable to change, quality school health education taught by trained and certified health educators provides the best opportunity to promote positive health behaviour among pupils and adolescents. They still added that promoting and establishing healthy behaviours for young people is more effective, and often easier, than efforts to change unhealthy behaviours already established in adult. In other words teaching of health education to children in primary schools which is the foundational level of the nation's education will help them develop healthy life style that will help them in future.

Conclusion

The researchers concluded that the effective teaching of health education actually improved the healthy lifestyle of the primary school pupils in Awka urban area of Anambra state.

Recommendation

The researchers based on the findings recommended that:

- The Government both State and Federal through the ministry of education should organize capacity building conferences and workshops annually for primary school teachers on improved methods for teaching different subjects in primary schools especially health education for a sustainable development of a healthy life style among the primary school pupils.
- In the time table of the primary schools, health education should be given enough time for practical demonstrations for the pupils understanding

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