



Self-Awareness and Empathy as Life-Skills in the Education of Girls in the South-South States OF Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the components of life-skills education that girls in the South-South States need to acquire. Two research question and two hypotheses guided the study. The design of the study was descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 240,000 female SSII students of 2015/2016 academic session. The sample size for the study was 672 drawn through multi-stage sampling procedure. The instrument used for data collection was life-skill education for girls' questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.85. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were analyzed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The findings from the study reveal that there is no significant difference in the mean response of girls on components of life-skills education relating to self-awareness and empathy in the South-South States of Nigeria. Based on these findings it is recommended that self-awareness and empathy as component of life-skills should be used to educate the girls in South-South States, Nigeria.

Introduction

Life-Skills Based Education (LSBE) has a long history of supporting child development and health promotion. The struggles for gender equality in all areas of development date back several decades during which time various commitments, conventions, declarations and plans of action were drawn, ratified and to a certain extent implemented. In 1986, the Ottawa Charter for health promotion recognised Life-skills in terms of making better health choices. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) linked Life-skills to education by stating that education should be directed towards the development of the child's fullest potential (World Health Organisation, 2004).

Life-skills education for girls is an important necessity. A skill is a learned ability. Also, a skill is described as the capability of an individual to perform a task well and achieve the desired result with little energy and high output (Babatunde, 2015). Life-skills are those competencies that assist people in functioning well in the environment in which they live. Life-skills could also be seen as "the ability for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (World Health Organisation, 2007). On the other hand, as a behaviour change or behaviour development approach, UNICEF (2007) designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills which are essentially those abilities that help to promote mental well-being and the competence in young people as they face the realities of life. Life-skills education is an important vehicle to equip young people to negotiate and mediate challenges and risks in their lives, and to enable productive participation in society.

In promoting the teaching of life-skills, the World Health Organisation is equipping learners with various life-skills in order to promote or improve all aspects of quality of education and

ensuring excellence. However, there is growing recognition that with changes in many cultures and life styles, many young girls are not sufficiently equipped with life-skills to help them deal with the increased demands and stresses they experience (World Health Organisation, 1997). Boys in their nature can endure and accommodate whatever situation they find themselves, but with girls it is different. The girls are in most need of the acquisition of these life-skills than the boys because of their natural tendency and need more care as well as security.

Life-skills are already being taught in many schools around the world. In some countries of the world, there are several important life-skills initiatives, originating from non-governmental organisations, education authorities and religious groups (WHO, 2007). Some of the specific areas emphasized and dealt with in this article are self-awareness and empathy. Boyatzis, Goleman and Rhee (2000) opine that the five most critical areas of self-awareness that have been found to be the key in developing success in all areas of life-skills education are emotional intelligence, personal values, learning style, orientation towards change, and core self-evaluation.

Self-awareness is the embodiment of many things. It includes one's recognition of oneself, of one's character, one's strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes. When self-awareness is developed, it can help an individual to recognize when he/she is stressed or felt under pressure (WHO, 1997). There are so many children in the South-South states of Nigeria that are lacking in the area of self-awareness. They are not aware of who they are, or who they ought to be so as to realise their goal in life. They are confused and frustrated for life. The acquiring of this self-awareness by the girls is very necessary in their education as the lack of it is destructive. Anyone that does not know himself or herself cannot understand anything about his/her being or other people. Self-awareness is often a prerequisite for effective communication and interpersonal relationship; it is also for the developing of empathy with other people which enhances creative thinking.

Empathy is the ability to imagine what life is like for another person, even in a situation that we may not be familiar with (WHO, 1997). If empathy is excluded in our lives, our communication with others will be a one-way traffic. National Commission for Human Development (2007) stated that empathy is the ability to develop insight into the motives, feelings, and behaviour of others and the ability to communicate this understanding without value judgment and without putting conditions or limits on what the person experiences, ignoring your own perception of the situation. The worst is, we will be acting and behaving according to our self-interest and will be bound to run into problems. The acquisition of empathy will help the girl to understand and accept others who may be very different from her, which could improve her social interaction, for instance, in situations of ethnic or cultural diversity. The girl will be better prepared to communicate her needs and desires in her education. She will be able to elicit support from others, and win their understanding. This will be very important in the education of the girl; this will help her as she thinks critically.

Observational evidence by the researcher indicates that many young people lack life-skills. Therefore, people need these life-skills to stand a chance of getting jobs that pay decent wages and become a productive force in the economy. These skills are best acquired through formal education. But many people enter adult life without the skills. The acquisition of these life-skills will definitely equip the girls to achieve their ambitions through proper and qualitative education. The teaching of life-skills is in a wide variety of educational programmes with demonstrable effectiveness that will be of great assistance to the girls and development in the child's knowledge.



The girl should be introduced to many areas of life-skills to be acquired in order to find out where her interest lies. In order to know the girl better, there is need to open the way for the girl through close interactions and discussions with the school counsellors. The parents and teachers should aim at creating a supporting and motivating learning environment. The learning environment should be established at the outset through factors such as the style adopted by the teacher and the physical layout of a classroom (Bruce & Meggitt, 2002).

The persistent poor academic performance among students including girls in the secondary school has been an issue of great concern among stakeholders in education. This is as a result of the lack of life-skills exhibition. Life-skills education is in existence in most parts of the world while in some other countries, like Nigeria, it is yet to be implemented. The acquisition of life-skills like self-awareness and empathy would empower students to perform well and to achieve the desired goals with high productivity. The students that acquire these life-skills will become self-sustained. Therefore, the situation which girls are facing in the South- South States of Nigeria could be improved upon with the education of life-skills in schools.

Purpose of the Study

The study specifically sought to

1. determine the mean response of girls on self-awareness in the South-South States.
2. determine the mean response of girls on empathy in the South-South States.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the mean response of girls on self-awareness in the South-South States?
2. What is the mean response of girls on empathy in the South-South States?

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses guided the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- Ho₁ There was no significant difference in the mean response of girls on self-awareness in the South-South States.
- Ho₂ There was no significant difference in the mean response of girls on ascertaining empathy in the South-South States.

Research Method

Descriptive survey design was adopted in this study. According to Nworgu (2006) this type of design enables a researcher to obtain data from a given population, analyse the data and use it to describe the population. The descriptive survey design helped the researcher to investigate the components of life-skills education for girls in the South-South States of Nigeria and gather facts about a given population. The research area for this study is the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. The area of study includes: Akwa Ibom State, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers States and it is a geo-political zone which is occupied mainly by the minorities of southern Nigeria.

The population of this study involved all the SSII female students in government owned co-educational and girls' schools in the 2015/2016 academic session. The population size was 240,000. The choice of the senior secondary II girls was guided by more female students is prone to drop-out of schools after junior secondary examinations. The sample size for this study was 672 SSII female students. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used for this study. The instrument that was used for this study was a structured questionnaire titled Life-skills Education for Girls Questionnaire

(LSEGQ). The instrument was validated by one expert in measurement and evaluation and guidance and counselling in Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha method and found to be 0.85. The mean values and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A mean of 2.5 was used as criterion value for taking decisions. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for testing the entire hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

In this chapter, the results are presented based on the data collected in the course of the study. The presentation follows the sequence of the research questions and the null hypotheses.

Research Question One: What is the mean response of girls on self-awareness in the South-South States?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviations of responses of girls on self-awareness in the South-South States

S/N	Item statements	Akwa-Ibom (N=242)			Edo (N=221)			Rivers (N=209)		
		\bar{x}	SD	Dec	\bar{x}	SD	Dec	\bar{x}	SD	Dec
1	know what I am capable to do.	3.27	0.75	A	3.24	0.74	A	3.21	0.88	A
2	know in what field I can excel.	3.18	0.73	A	3.13	0.76	A	3.22	0.81	A
3	come to know the values of education.	3.27	0.69	A	3.19	0.85	A	3.38	0.71	A
4	know that success is as a result of hard work.	3.22	0.66	A	3.07	0.86	A	3.17	0.80	A
5	Rediscover how to choose my life career.	3.15	0.73	A	3.03	0.79	A	3.16	0.85	A
6	Realize that time wasted can never be regained.	3.16	0.65	A	3.06	0.69	A	2.98	0.88	A
7	come to understand the evils of cheating.	3.29	0.72	A	3.16	0.76	A	3.09	0.80	A
8	Know that attending classes regularly takes priority in my life.	3.22	0.69	A	3.17	0.67	A	3.35	0.84	A
9	Realize that keeping school rules is gateways to success.	3.30	0.64	A	3.27	0.66	A	3.22	0.85	A
10	come to know the evil of examination malpractices.	3.30	0.63	A	3.26	0.70	A	3.30	0.76	A
	Cluster mean	3.24	0.37	A	3.16	0.45	A	3.21	0.49	A

Key: N = Number of respondents, \bar{x} = mean, SD = Standard Deviation, Dec. = Decision.

The finding presented in Table 1 reveals the mean and standard deviations of responses of girls' on self-awareness in the South-South States of Nigeria. The finding reveals that all the respondents agreed on items 1 – 10. This is because the mean ratings for the three states on girls' self-awareness are above the criterion level of 2.50 for accepting an item. The cluster means of 3.24, 3.16 and 3.21 with standard deviations of 0.37, 0.45 and 0.49 for Akwa-Ibom, Edo and Rivers States, respectively, reveal that the respondents agreed on all the items in Table 1 as girls' self-awareness.



Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the mean response of girls on self- awareness in the South-South States.

Table 2: ANOVA of the significant difference in the mean response of girls on self- awareness in the South-South States

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Dec
Between groups	0.736	2	0.368	1.87	0.1	NS
Within groups	131.107	669	0.196			
Total	131.842	671				

As indicated on Table 2, an F-ratio of 1.87 was obtained with the associated probability value of 0.15. Since the associated probability value of 0.15 is greater than 0.05 set as level of significance, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) which stated that there is no significant difference in the mean response of girls on self- awareness in the South-South States was not rejected. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean response of girls on self- awareness in the South-South States of Nigeria. This means that the respondents from the three states shared the same opinion on girls' self-awareness.

Research Question TWO: What is the mean response of girls on empathy in the South-South States?

Table 3 Mean and standard deviations of responses of girls on empathy in the South-South States

S/N	Item statements	Akwa-Ibom (N=242)			Edo (N=221)			Rivers (N=209)		
		\bar{x}	SD	Dec.	\bar{x}	SD	Dec.	\bar{x}	SD	Dec.
I:										
1	accept others even in their mistakes.	3.27	0.78	A	2.95	1.05	A	3.12	0.82	A
2	Know that no two persons are alike.	3.22	0.69	A	3.24	0.74	A	3.45	0.71	A
3	respect the ideas of others.	3.23	0.72	A	3.16	0.73	A	3.23	0.72	A
4	Shun ridiculing others.	3.19	0.59	A	3.11	0.63	A	3.15	0.77	A
5	Share in the joy of others	3.19	0.61	A	3.10	0.63	A	2.86	0.86	A
6	feel the pains of others.	3.15	0.66	A	3.08	0.65	A	3.11	0.80	A
7	am delighted in the success of others.	3.31	0.73	A	3.26	0.67	A	3.24	0.65	A
8	encourage others by good examples.	3.00	0.95	A	3.02	0.85	A	3.03	0.92	A
9	become my brother's or sister's keeper.	3.30	0.66	A	3.28	0.61	A	3.32	0.67	A
10	mingle freely with people of different cultural background.	3.15	0.66	A	3.15	0.68	A	3.33	0.75	A
Cluster mean		3.20	0.35	A	3.14	0.40	A	3.18	0.41	A

Key: N = Number of respondents, \bar{x} = mean, SD = Standard Deviation, Dec. = Decision.

The finding in Table 3 reveals the mean and standard deviations of responses on girls' empathy in the South-South States, Nigeria. All the respondents agreed on items 1 – 10 as girls' empathy, this is because the mean ratings for the three states on girls' empathy are above the criterion level of 2.50 for accepting an item. This means that the girls accept others even in their mistakes, know that no two persons are alike, respect the ideas of others, shun ridiculing others, share in the joy of others, feel the pains of others, are delighted in the success of others, encourage others by good examples, become their brothers' or sisters' keeper and mingle freely with people of different cultural background. The cluster means of 3.20, 3.14 and 3.18 with their corresponding standard deviations of 0.35, 0.40 and 0.41 for Akwa-Ibom, Edo and Rivers States, respectively, reveal that the respondents agreed on all the items on Table 2 as girls' empathy.

Hypothesis TWO: There is no significant difference in the mean response of girls on ascertaining empathy in the South-South States.

Table 4: ANOVA of the significant difference in the mean response of girls on ascertaining empathy in the South-South States

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Dec
Between groups	0.531	2	0.265	1.730	0.18	NS
Within groups	102.660	669	0.153			
Total	103.191	671				

The ANOVA finding of the significant difference in the mean response of girls on ascertaining empathy in the South-South States of Nigeria is presented on Table 4. An F-ratio of 1.730 was obtained with the associated probability value of 0.18. Since the associated probability value is greater than 0.05 set as level of significance, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) which stated that there is no significant difference in the mean response of girls on ascertaining empathy in the South-South States is not rejected. The inference drawn therefore is that there is no significant difference in the mean response of girls on ascertaining empathy in the South-South States of Nigeria. This means that the respondents from the three states shared the same opinion on girls' ascertaining empathy.

Discussion

The findings from this study are discussed in line with the research questions and hypotheses raised in the study. The discussion is presented based on Self-awareness of girls in the South-South States. The finding from this study on response of girls on self-awareness reveals that there is no item that was rejected by the respondents. This reveals that all the items were agreed upon. It means that the girls know what they are capable of doing, and which field that they can perform best. They know too that success could only be as the result of hard work. They have rediscovered how to choose their life career, realising that time wasted can never be regained. They also come to the understanding that cheating is evil, realising that to keep the school rules is the gateway to success. They have also come to realise the evils of examination malpractices.

The null hypothesis on this is retained, implying that the respondents from the three States shared the same opinion on girls' self-awareness. The present finding on self-awareness is in consonance with what the World Health Organisation (2004) said that the concept includes recognition of the 'self', character, strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes. It is often a prerequisite for interpersonal relationship and self-knowledge, which are the requirements for



consequent creation of empathy for others.

Furthermore, the finding on self-awareness is in line with the opinion of Boyatzis, Goleman and Rhee (2000) that the five most critical areas of self-awareness that have been found to be the key in developing success in all areas of life-skills education are emotional intelligence, personal values, learning style, orientation towards change, and core self-evaluation. These areas play very important roles towards the achieving life success, performing effectively in teams, wise decision, life-long learning and development, creativity, communication competency.

The findings from the study on girls' empathy in the South-South states reveal that all the respondents agreed on items 1-10 as girls' empathy. This means that the girls accept others even in their mistakes, know that no two persons are alike, respect the ideas of others, shun ridiculing others, share in the joy of others and feel in the pains of others. They are also delighted in the success of others, encourage others by their good examples, be their brothers' or sisters' keepers and are able to mingle freely with people of different cultural background. The respondents in the three states of the South-South, Akwa Ibom, Edo and Rivers showed that they all agreed on all the items.

This finding is not in line with the provision by the National Commission for Human Development (2007) that empathy is the ability to develop insight into the motives, feelings, and behaviour of others and the ability to communicate this understanding without value judgment and without putting conditions or limits on what the person experiences, ignoring your own perception of the situation. It goes further to include being open with your feelings, showing and encouraging others to be open with theirs. Again, that it is not just to think about yourself but to think about others' feelings and to have a sense of their points of view. This is done by learning to walk in their shoes to know what it feels like and to see what can be done about it.

Conclusion

Base on the findings from this study, it is concluded that, life-skills variables such as self-awareness and empathy are very important for girls' education. This is because the responses from the girls in South-South States indicate that they need the identified life-skills for their survival. All the identified life-skills will serve as a spring board in the education of the girls. With the acquisition of these life-skills in their education, they will realise their goals in life, how to achieve them and how to handle them successfully.

Knowledge of these life-skills will help the girls to be aware of their problems, find solutions to them, make the right choices, communicate effectively, think creatively and critically, and will have the ability to cope with emotion and stress. Professional counsellors have vital role to play in promoting girls education through constant counselling and creation of awareness programme in the society and Nigerian schools. Counsellors should initiate awareness education that would raise girls' consciousness about exploitative structures that surround them (cultural and traditional) with the view to initiating actions to overcome them.

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