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SEX EDUCATION FOR YORUBA TEENAGERS IN THE USA -CHALLENGE

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Abstract

The paper argues that first-generation Yoruba parents and their middle and high school teenagers and their children's sex education teachers in the United States of America face challenges due to a conflict of culture. The argument is premised on the consideration of relevant information from scholars and Yoruba cultural ideas about child training regarding sex education, and the observation of the situation. The purpose of the paper is to draw the attention of key role players -first-generation parents, their children, and schoolteachers and school administrators in education- to how cultural inclusiveness, understanding, and collaboration among them can promote successful sex education for teenagers from a diverse or culturally different background. The import from the argument fits other places (countries or environments) with a similar experience.

Keywords: *Conflict and collaboration, Education, Sex, Teenagers*

Introduction

The concept of education among first-generation Yoruba immigrants in North America and other countries is rooted in their home country's culture. Afọláyán (2018, p. 157) notes the challenge that they face abroad, a low context area with less restriction on people: "The sociological reality is that the continuous survival of a culture is predicated on the successful passing of that culture from one generation to another. If the baton drops or is poorly exchanged, the race is bound to flop and fail. Likewise, cultural transmission

presupposes a dynamic process in which one generation flawlessly passes the cultural nuances to members of a newer one.” The import of the quotation is that cultural values may stop or get diluted if there is a new environment where cultural transmission is not fully allowed. In addition, Afoláyan seems to be saying that there is a gradual loss of the culture of those who travel abroad because they are challenged in raising their children or teenagers according to their own culture in a foreign country. The United States where many first-generation Yoruba now live promotes sex education in schools though the implementation may vary. No matter what difference may exist in how different states in the United States implement sex education, most parents support the idea that sex education should be taught in middle and high schools. Kanton and Levitz (2017) write that, in a survey of some parents’ thoughts about sex education, 93 percent of them support the teaching of it. This number is very significant and may suggest parents who are immigrants are inclusive and like schools giving sex education to their teenage children. While the manifestation of such an idea is possible, the new experience of the first-generation Yoruba parents differs; sex education does not only have implications for their welfare in their US environment; it also affects their children and their teachers.

Afolayan’s idea is connected to the psychological impact of the experience on parents who find it difficult to transfer their traditional training to their children. In the United States, the Yoruba immigrants who are first-generation abroad contend with two or more cultural values as they raise their children. Giving children sex education minimally as Yoruba culture means telling any teenagers, especially young girls, to protect themselves from engaging in pre-marital sex and intercourse discussions, but by law, though reluctantly, Yoruba teenagers access American sex education in the country which is often described as the “melting pot of cultures”, a place with a lot of freedom for teenagers and emphasis on teenagers’ right to know about sex or sexuality at a young age. Hall et al. (2016) state that because of time limits the US schools prioritize sex education in schools and commit funds to it despite opposition from some quarters. In other words, US learning institutions for teenagers promote sex education. The scholars also mention that social media are also venues for teenagers to access sex education in the US. It is good that they also mention the role of social media in disseminating social media. The inference is that

Yoruba teenagers with access to the Internet and other social media can learn about sex education on their own like other teenagers whose parents' background differs.

First-generation Africans abroad experience culture shock in their new environments. They react differently to their new experience and often feel nostalgic when they encounter new, strange situational issues. One of such peoples is the Yoruba of Nigeria and Benin Republics. The high value the Yoruba abroad place on their female children's sexual morality is premised on the Yoruba traditional wedding culture which prohibits girls or teenagers and yet-to-be-married young women from having sex before marriage. In traditional Yoruba settings in Africa, parents offer informal training to keep their female children from engaging in sex before marriage. The culture of the people also forbids girls from using sexual gestures and displaying sex-ignited postures, except in cultural entertainment. Even in Yoruba verbal art training, only the grown-up or experienced verbal artists, as a norm, handle and render or transfer the bulk of any sexual composition in public places. The Yoruba traditional training to keep young female children or teenagers safe includes comes through folktales, personal stories, verbal warnings, restrictions, home tasks, monitoring, and physical punishment. In the United States, parents with such a background, prefer to train their children as if they are in their home country. Such parents grew up in families with a core Yoruba home where traditional training about sex education is limited to what is customary for children to know and acquire at the right age, so these Yoruba parents do appreciate their traditional culture. They believe that the training they got as children has placed on them the label of chastity which they would like to transfer to their children in their new environment. While there is no data to prove the claims that such parents were pure when they were adolescents, no one can deny their position or view about themselves and their cultural beliefs or practices.

Ọláiyà, T (in Fálọlá, T., and Akínyemí, A. 2017) focuses on the idea of purity for Yoruba teenagers when the scholar defines the word "chastity" as "a life free from sexual immorality" (678). The scholar expands the idea by adding a statement that captures the moral value of the Yoruba which relates to sex education in their cultural environment or background in Africa: "Yoruba custom frowns at the pre-marital sex as well as extra-marital sexual relations." In other words, for most Yoruba first-generation parents, the virginity of

girls and sexual moral decency are important. They would like or want their female children or teenagers to go to American schools to avoid what they consider immoral talks or sex before marriage. Sex talks fall within their definition of immorality, so they would want their teenagers to avoid them. Even if they would want married people to conduct themselves in a culturally acceptable manner; they abhor promiscuity though many still engage in indecent or extramarital affairs today. *Ọláiyà* adds, “This makes parents always keep a close watch on their girls. Sex education is done with much care; it is only given when it becomes necessary to do so” among the Yoruba. Sex education begins when parents start to notice the signs of physical development that indicate that young girls may be tempted to engage in sex and the process is usually in bits and maybe in coded language, analogies and/or scenarios, and victim-examples and verbal arts. Most focus on young girls while boys are hardly given any except when parents feel they should not impregnate any girl or woman to avoid placing a burden on them (parents) and/or themselves (boys).

Now what are the implications of insisting on giving core Yoruba training to Yoruba adolescents in American middle or high schools? The answer is simple. One implication is that children who do not get support from their parents are more than likely to misbehave, get frustrated, feel isolated, be rebellious, and be aggressive in schools and at home, and they are very likely to keep their sexual encounters secret from their parents or guardians and others until they get pregnant and face the consequences such as dropping out of school, get delayed education, and feel ashamed, lose confidence, and face childbirth process and any related repercussions. They will also take care of parents and become children taking care of children if parents are not willing to help them in the situation.

Another implication is that Yoruba teenagers who get sex education in schools may act strangely by displaying divided attention or frustration because their parents are not comfortable about it at home. For example, teenagers may not show interest in sex education when exposed to it due to the impression they get from home; they may feel compelled to follow what they learn from their parents at home. They may also feel isolated or stay quiet during discussions. To the Yoruba teenagers who cling to what the first-generation parents in America tell them, the school teaches immorality through sex education. That may sound like a guess! The reality is that when teenagers spend more

time interacting with their age group or schoolmates, the more they involve themselves in the issues relating to their generation. The emphasis here is that Yoruba teenagers, pitched between two conflict cultures in the US, are likely to act strangely because they must struggle to know where belong culture-wise. In other words, their adaptation to the sex education needs in American classrooms and society poses a challenge to them. As the schoolers struggle to choose between sex education that is culturally acceptable in their homes and the kind the school environment offers, so are their first-generation parents. Garcia (2021) seems to understand the conflicting experience of anyone within the context of conflicting cultures or environments while talking about how power shapes human beings: “Generations of conflict at home and abroad have shaped the environment we live in now. It is up to us to decide what we will do about how our environment has been shaped and how we have been shaped along with it.” To apply Garza’s idea, first-generation parents have to understand their quagmire or difficult situation and environment like people who fall apart in other aspects of life such as conflicting power, economy, and politics do to make a headway; in other words, first-generation Yoruba parents and their children (teenagers) in the United States who are situated with two conflicting cultures on sex education need to understand their situation and work collaboratively with themselves, school administrators, and teachers to create convenience for themselves and their children. Otherwise, Yoruba their teenagers, like other people in the same situation, may display divided attention in the classroom and feel odd and/or unsupported. Thus, learning may be difficult for them.

Yoruba parents do not feel comfortable when schools teach their children sex education. The attitude of the Yoruba is typical of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa. Frimpong (2022) draws readers’ attention to the 2015 observation of Szlachta, another scholar who finds an issue about the teaching of sex education in American schools: “Teachers in the United States who teach sexuality often run into a conflict among immigrant families whose view on sex education is different.” While the scholar does not mention the Yoruba, his use of immigrants, one can say, includes the first generation of Yoruba abroad and their likes from other parts of the world with high-context cultures.

Although the Yoruba parents in America like to give sex education to their children as it should be in their traditional African culture and fit as contributors to the melting pot

of cultures in the United States, they probably did not realize an issue before leaving their continent for North America. Scholars have drawn attention to that. The endangerment of Yoruba cultural values does not start in North Africa; it began in Africa and persists there now. As Ogunfolakan (in Falola, T. & Akinyemi, A., 2017) states: “Unfortunately, with the arrival of foreign cultures and religions, most of the Yoruba tangible and intangible heritages are facing destruction” (p.689). If such a change could happen in Nigeria or elsewhere in Africa, the perceived wreck of American sex education on Yoruba culture which children and their parents seem to suffer will be a colossus in the United States where American culture is predominant.

Do the teachers of middle and high school teenagers whose parents are first-generation Yoruba in America feel the impact of their learner’s situation in a sex education classroom? If they do, how do they? In the absence of data to respond to the question now, what one can do to keep balance by assuming that the answer is yes? Of course, the answer is yes. Why? Usually, the teachers of distracted learners will not feel fulfilled until their students successfully apply the skills from the class instructions. Higgen (2020, par 57) offers a clue: “A few teachers and externals stated that cultural or religious conflicts between children do not originate from the students themselves but are attributable to some parents who promote prejudices.” Although the scholar bases the submission on gender role diversity, the statement can also assume a more dimension to signal the issue of silent or hidden bias against foreign cultural education in the schools that Yoruba teenagers attend in the United States. In a situation like that, the influence of first-generation Yoruba parents will have negative impacts on the behavior or attitude of their teenage children in school. A lack of interest or self-isolation by students will hinder the work of the teacher. It may be difficult for the teacher to get such students on the track that the American educational system expects in the country. In addition, the teacher may have to create a coping mechanism against any direct or indirect protest from parents who feel their children should not be taught immoral lessons. These are all possibilities. The extent each can take depends on the parents’ current cultural immersion in the United States, a low-context society.

Based on the ideas above, the Yoruba immigrants -parents and their teenagers -are sandwiched between two cultures -the American culture which provides teenagers with sex

education with what appears to be little or no restriction, and the Yoruba culture which restricts children from getting too much sex education traditionally. The Yoruba culture gives minimal information which is not often released until about marriage time or when the situation demands.

Ìṣòlá, (2010) must have read the minds of many Yoruba parents abroad when he said says that cultural heritage offers moral values. In the current context, the premise on which Yoruba parents from traditional backgrounds base good sex education is purity or sex-avoidance before marriage. The first-generation Yoruba parents of teenagers in middle and high schools in the United States, by their cultural beliefs and training, are, therefore, prone to being skeptical about the sex education that teachers offer to their children. The cultural conflict relating to child training in both places (home and schools) as an issue may seem invisible to the public, but it is real; schools, students, and parents who are involved cannot pretend it does not exist. The bouncing effect of the culture conflict training-wise, therefore, poses a challenge to teenage schoolers, and their parents and teachers. Learners from first-generation parents who stick to their traditional culture will develop a favorable attitude towards sex education and make an adjustment that suits them when teaching accommodates their cultural values. Foreign Yoruba parents will feel comfortable when they know their cultural values are not being ignored by teachers. Teachers too will do better in teaching such students with foreign cultural needs and have a better relationship with their parents. The issue calls for a critical review of sex education curriculum and teaching in the United States middle and high schools; the call is in the interest of teenagers, first-generation Yoruba parents, and schools. It also draws attention to other hidden but similar people whose cultures should matter in United States schools.

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