

HEALTH EDUCATION APPROACHES IN WELLNESS PROMOTION IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Wellness promotion is relevant in addressing public health challenges especially among schools and communities. Health and wellness in schools and communities are determined by such factors as socio-economic conditions, state of one's health, exercise and fitness level. This paper examined wellness promotion variables in schools and communities and the health education approach. Health education is a preventive strategy for achieving desirable change in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours and skills for the attainment of optimum standard of healthy living. The paper concluded that health educators should identify school and community health needs, adopt relevant approaches and strategies in meeting the needs. The paper recommended among others the need for wellness programme as an intervention to be developed and implemented in schools and communities.

Key words: *Wellness, Health, School, Community and health education*

Introduction

Health and wellness teaching is rapidly becoming a vital part of the school day, as more children and young people are going to school with conditions that negatively impact their lives. According to Brent, Clive & Ashleigh (2017), children and youths are increasingly entering schools lacking self-confidence, and suffering from litany of social, emotional and physical health concerns. This health concerns may emanate from the prevailing economic down-turn, ethno-religious crisis, geographical and political insecurity leading to broken homes, child abuse and neglect, child labour and out-of-school children.

Most schools experience a wide range of health problems. Some of these problems lie within the school while others are problems of the surrounding community, which impact on the school environments and, by the extension, the health and wellness of learners and staff. According to the Center for Disease Control (2015), establishing healthy behaviours during childhood is easier and

more effective than trying to change unhealthy behaviours during adulthood. The promotion of health and wellness of learners in schools is a critical step towards achievement of quality education. In 2001, both the Federal Ministries of Education and Health in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) took the initial step by conducting a Rapid Assessment of School Health System in Nigeria to ascertain the status of school health in the promotion of wellness and health of the learners. The assessment noted the several health problems among learners, the lack of health and sanitation facilities in schools and communities and the need for urgent action in school health (FMOE, 2006).

It is therefore imperative that the school community must establish, develop and maintain wellness programmes that would promote the health and wellness of the learners, staff and community members.

Conceptual Review of Key Terms

Wellness

Wellness is the way to achieve health as a goal. According to the National Wellness Institute (2015), wellness is considered as an active process through which people become aware of and make choices toward a more successful existence. It is the optimal state of health of an individual or groups. Wellness is an active and dynamic process of change and growth to reach one's fullest potential and aims to enhance overall well-being.

In order to promote health and wellness in schools and communities, individuals or groups need a comprehensive wellness programme. Wellness programmes largely focus on the idea of preventive care, which is primarily designed to save the individual and group's money on health issues. Wellness programmes have a direct influence on overall health which is essential for living a healthy, happy and fulfilled life (WHO, 1948). Wellness entails making the choice to eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly and moderately and schedule regular medical check-ups. Common tips to improve health and wellness in schools and communities are:

1. Eat whole foods such as grains, fruits, proteins and healthful fat sources.
2. Moderate but regular exercise such as walking, jogging, cycling and so on. They are vital as they support both physical and mental health.
3. Embrace mental exercise, too. They help to boost brain power.
4. Achieve quality rest and sleep.
5. Seek social interaction and improved relationship with one another. Good relationships and interactions help to make students, staff and community members happier and also improve wellness. Wellness is taught in seven dimensions of physical, social, intellectual, emotional, occupational, spiritual and environmental. All these make up the concepts of the whole man (CDC, 2015).

Health Promotion

World Health Organization Ottawa charter on Health promotion (1986), stated that Health promotion is seen as the process of enabling people to increase control over and to improve their health. It covers a wide range of social and environmental interventions that are designed to benefit and protect individual people's health and quality of life by addressing and preventing the root causes of ill-health, not just focusing on treatment and cure. Three key elements of Health Promotion according to WHO, (2016), are;

1. Good governance for health
2. Health literacy
3. Healthy cities

Health promotion is the science and art of helping people change their lifestyle to move toward a state of optimal health. Using the dimensions of wellness, Bastaki, (2012), described optimal health as a balance of physical, environmental, social, spiritual and emotional health. To achieve optimal health, positive lifestyle changes are desirable. Lifestyle change can be facilitated through a combination of efforts to enhance awareness, change behaviours, and create an environment that supports good health practices. Health promotion in a school setting is any activity undertaken to improve and/or protect the health of all school users. It is a broader concept than health education and it includes provision and activities relating to; healthy school policies, the school's physical and social environment, the curriculum, community links and health services (Kwazulu-Natal Department of Health, 2001).

Health Education

This is a profession of educating people about health. It is seen as communication activity designed at enhancing positive health as well as preventing or diminishing ill-health in individuals and groups by influencing the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of individuals as well as the community in general (Downie, Fyfe & Tannahill, 1990). The concepts of Health Education entail the development of individual, groups, institutions, communities, and systematic strategies to improve health knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours. The purpose of health education therefore is to positively influence the health and behaviour of individuals and communities as well as the living and working conditions that influence their health (Lynne, Laurie & Donna, 2017).

Health Education plays a crucial role in the development of healthy, inclusive and equitable social, psychological and physical environment. It reflects current best practices, using an empowering, multi-dimensional, multi-

professional approach which relates to all settings, organizations, including the community, schools, health services and workplace (Gordon, 2008).

The School

The school as an institution provides learning opportunities of different categories with the support of teachers. It affords learners opportunities to meet and relate with other people outside the family setting. It exposes them to avenues to perform different tasks thereby determine life chances. As a formal and planned institution, the school also promotes the health and wellness of the students through effective teaching-learning strategies (Babalola & Fadoju, 2003).

The Community

In a broad sense, the community has a complex level of human behaviour that is geographically based on groups of people who share common values, goals and interests. It is an organized group of people with solidarity ties, through whose interaction, systems of life and institutions are established to allow for the probability of nature, defence and survival (Adewole, 1988).

The school is just a unit within the community and members of the school relate to the community either as individuals or in groups, that is; there is mutual interaction between the school and its environment. Promoting wellness in school therefore has significant effects on the health of the community members (Babalola & Fadoju, 2003).

Promoting Health and Wellness in Schools and Communities

Schools are pivotal in reducing childhood and adolescent's diseases by providing students with the opportunity to learn and practice healthful lifestyles, cultivate healthful eating habits and encourage physical activity behaviours. To make this process easier, the Center for Disease Control (2011) offered best practices to help schools and communities develop, implement and evaluate school based healthful eating and physical activity practices. Such practices are embedded in their guidelines developed to make schools and communities healthier. They include;

1. Uses of a coordinated approach to develop implement and evaluate healthful eating and physical activity policies and practices.
2. Establishment of conducive school and community environments that will support healthful eating and physical activity (the entire school environment be conducive).
3. Implementation of health education programmes that provide students and community members with the knowledge, attitude, skills and experiences needed for healthful activities.

4. Implementation of a comprehensive physical activity programmes with quality physical education as the cornerstone. Children, teens and young adults should participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.
5. Providing students and community members with health, mental health and social services to address healthful eating, physical activity and related chronic diseases prevention.
6. Partnering with schools, families and community members in the implementation and development of healthy activities' policies, practices and programmes.
7. Providing school employee and community members with wellness programme that includes all healthy activities for all members.
8. Employing competent personnel to and provide professional development opportunities for school staff members and out-of-school time programmes.

According to Federal Ministry of Education (2006), healthful eating patterns are essential for students to achieve their full academic potential, full physical and mental growth and lifelong health and well-being. Thus, the school feeding service is recognised as a strong means of improving enrolment, attendance, retention, completion and learning achievement in pupils. The programme also serves as an avenue for teaching basic hygiene and nutritional facts to learners in school and invariably to community members. Specifically, to promote wellness and health among students and community members, a healthy school environment is desirable. A healthful school living environment embraces the health and safety of learners and other members of the school community. According to FMOE (2006), healthful school environment is an essential factor in achieving the overall goals of the School Health Programme (SHP) because it has implications for all areas of school health. It attends to the physical and aesthetic surroundings and culture of the school community. The objectives of healthful school environment and school feeding service as enumerated in the national school health policy are;

1. To provide a safe and conducive living and learning conditions that maximises the benefits from educational programmes.
2. To promote healthful practices among learners and staff in order to prevent water and sanitation related illnesses and diseases.
3. To bring about positive changes in hygiene behaviour of learners and the community at large.
4. To provide safe recreational facilities in the school.
5. To organise school health club and day (a day set aside for discussing and evaluating health related issues where students are gainfully involved in

demonstrating health related activities. Different resource personnel from health related establishments should be invited to enlightening students more on health matters).

6. To establish interpersonal relationships within the school community.
7. To encourage compliance with approved environmental health and sanitation standards for schools.
8. Reduce hunger and malnutrition among learners.
9. Provision of safe water, safe waste disposal and nutritional education.

All these are geared towards the promotion of wellness and health of the learners and the community members.

Benefits of a Comprehensive Approach to Health and Wellness in School Community

A comprehensive approach to health and wellness is an effective way to improve both health and educational outcomes of the school children and young people in the community. There are a number of ways the school can make effective use of community resources to promote health and educational programmes of the school including wellness, social and physical activities. According to Berg, Hickson, Bradford and Fishburne (2017), developing a comprehensive approach has several benefits, including;

1. Encouraging and promoting health and wellness lifestyle choices.
2. Incorporating health and wellness into every aspect of school.
3. Identifying links between health and education issues and systems.
4. Supporting families and the community.

However, it has to be recognised that the teacher alone cannot meet up with the development of students' health and wellness. A truly comprehensive approach must include the teacher, the school and the community.

Role of the Teacher

Health education teachers hold a key leadership role in the delivery of health curriculum programmes. All teachers need to ensure that students acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will lead to positive health and wellness lifestyles. Specifically, teachers constantly display a unique opportunity of role model, positive health and wellness behaviours. All teachers also share professional responsibility for portraying personal behaviours that mirror and reinforce positive health and wellness behaviours for students (Brent *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, Berg *et al.* (2017) added that teachers can support a comprehensive approach to health and wellness by;

1. Understanding and appreciating the importance of health and wellness in their school communities.

2. Utilising where appropriate, methods to meet learning outcomes across all subject areas.
3. Supporting the development of a comprehensive approach to school health and wellness.
4. Delivering developmentally appropriate lessons.
5. Employing materials, resources and personnel from the school, home and community.
6. Role modeling an active and healthy lifestyle.

Role of the School

A coordinated programme is more than a collection of ideas, thoughts and individual lessons, with each teacher conducting his or her own lessons and programmes. According to Berg *et al* (2017), school personnel need to foster partnerships to ensure that activities lessons and initiatives are coordinated to maximise the success of school-wide health and wellness programme. The good of such programme is to develop and deliver an organised, sequential plan for teaching all students the necessary life skills that promote health and wellness. Active partnership between students, teachers, parent, health professionals and the community members need to be emphasised in order to maximise optimum student health and wellness.

Schools should foster and support a wide range of health and wellness promoting activities and services that occur in both the school and the community. Considerations should include; physical conditions of the buildings; playgrounds; management of noise; lighting; and air and water quality. Health and wellness education must be accessible and meaningful to students regardless of age, gender, race, ability, socio economic status, or religion (Berg *et al*, 2017).

Role of the Community

Anspaugh and Ezell (2010), reported that the school is perceived as an agency of the community. Families, friends, local organisations, and students themselves must play a critical role in wellness education. As students are influenced by actions and behaviours in their homes, neighbourhoods, local malls, recreation centers and so on, schools cannot take sole responsibility when a community experiences students who have developed problem behaviours in such as substance abuse and violence. Hence, for any prevention and intervention programme to be effective, such programme must be based on a collaborative approach involving the whole community.

Health Education Approach in Wellness Promotion

Health and wellness are important aspects of human life. It encompasses all activities aimed at ensuring the protection of the body from diseases and promoting good habits. Health education in school and community is a communication activity which involves teaching and learning pertaining to knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, skills and competencies. It focuses on any combination of learning experiences designed to help individuals and communities improve their health, by increasing their knowledge or influencing their attitudes (WHO, 2008; Johnson, 2010).

The school is a minor community within a larger one where it is situated and most of the activities that go on in the school depend on the composition of the host community. Most of the children and staff of some schools are sometimes from the host community and so the school cannot isolate itself entirely from the culture of the people. According to Babalola & Fadoju (2003), the health education teacher may sometimes be the “son of the soil”, that is an indigene of the community and at other places, he is not. Where he is, he should use the advantage of being an indigene to promote interaction between the school and the community. Such interaction should include;

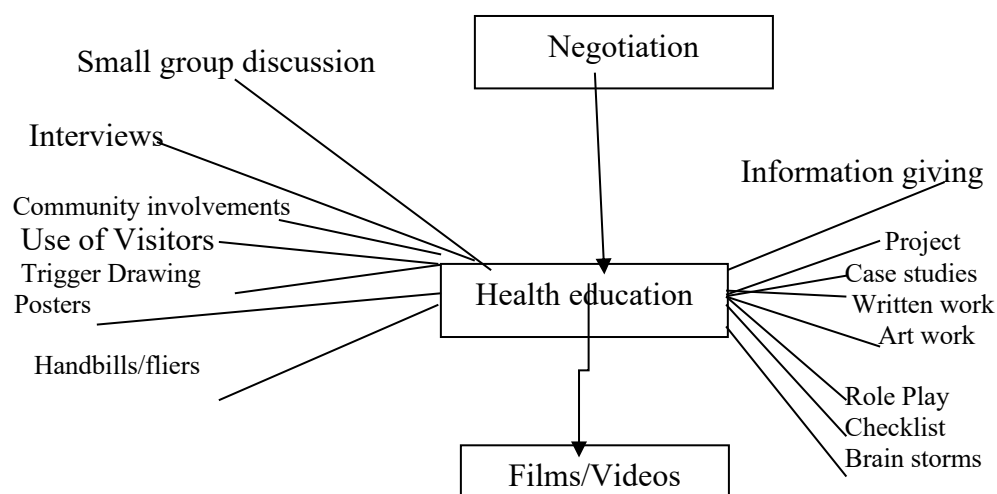
1. Making some school facilities and resources available to the community for health education and social purposes.
2. Visiting parents and well meaning members of the community to discuss health and wellness promotion issues.
3. Creating awareness and demonstrating active interest in community life by attending their functions.
4. Encouraging the school administrators to meet with the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) regularly so that the parents can have confidence in the school administration and its programmes, including health, wellness promotion and security.
5. Initiating joint efforts of the school community leadership aimed at enhancing learning environments to better promote healthy and sustainable behaviour change among students and community members.
6. Utilising evidence-based health education and health promotion methods or strategies to develop, promote and sustain the health and wellness of the students, staff and community members.

Specifically, Information Communication Technology (ICT) and its components especially the computer and cell phones have positive influence on the spread of information in schools and communities. Since health education is an integral part of the general education, all the usage and advantages of Information Communication Technology in education are applicable to the teaching and learning in health education (Famuyiwa, 2017).

Policies and strategies have been developed to integrate ICTs into education, health and wellness promotion. Some internet-based interventions can empower schools and communities by providing them with information and supportive tools that can help them improve their health related decisions and ultimately increase their quality of life and well-being. According to Balsa and Gandelman (2010), in a high risk community, the health educator might make use of his ICT components to track and communicate relevant authorities for quick interventions. The widespread use of the internet and mobile phones is currently promoting the chores of school communities. It provides support for not only health institutions and practitioners, but also for the population at large. The ICT-use fosters efficiency for health and wellness promotion through its subsidiaries by providing greater flexibility and can also be used by health educators for controlling, evaluating and managing health and wellness programmes in schools and communities (Ortega-Navas, 2016).

Similarly, Ademuwagun, Ajala, Oke, Moronkola and Jegede (2002) summarised the strategies for implementing health education programmes in schools and communities in the figure below;

Fig.1: Strategies for Implementing Health Education Programmes in Schools and Communities



Source: Ademuwagun et al (2002).

Each of the health education methods/strategies in Fig. I above may be used to implement or promote the content areas in health education and health promotion in schools and communities. For example, in schools the role of the health

educator cannot be overemphasised. Health educators teach health science or health education as a subject, promote and implement co-ordinated school health programmes, including first aid health services, student, staff and parent health education and promote healthy school environments and school community partnerships. They also develop education methods and materials; coordinate, promote and evaluate programmes and write funding proposals. Specifically, in community-organisations, health educators should help a community identify its needs, draw problem-solving abilities and mobilise its resources to develop, promote, implement and evaluate strategies to improve the community health status. To promote wellness, health educators do community organizing and outreach, grant writing, coalition building, and advocacy and develop, produce and evaluate mass media health campaigns (College of Public Health-University of Georgia, nd).

Conclusion

No school and community can address all its health problems alone. As students' health and wellness extend beyond the classrooms, a comprehensive framework that shares and integrates responsibility is needed. To promote health and wellness in schools and the community at large, a comprehensive wellness programmes that focus on the preventive care should be designed. Health Educators should identify school and community needs, draw problem solving techniques and mobilise its resources to develop, promote, implement and evaluate strategies to improve the health status of the school communities.

On the basis of the submission in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. Health education of the people about wellness promotion both in schools and communities should be encouraged and supported by the relevant authorities- governments, non-governmental organisations, school administrations, and teachers.
2. The school communities should be educated on the need to seek prevention as well as the information regarding healthful eating habits and exercises.
3. Health educators should take leadership role in health and wellness promotion using relevant health education strategies and models.
4. Government and non-governmental organisations such as WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO should develop a comprehensive wellness programmes for schools and communities. Such intervention programmes should not be under any political attachment or affiliations.
5. There is also need for schools and community members to form coalition to be headed by competent health educators and community support members to drive in health promotion programmes in those areas.

6. Government should collaborate with the community leaders and school heads to fund, develop and implement health and wellness programmes that would be enduring.

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