



EFFECTIVENES OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION FOR UNDERAGE PREGNANCY PREVENTION: A CASE OF RONGO SUB-COUNTY SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT This study evaluated the effectiveness of communication strategies in life skills education for underage pregnancy prevention in public secondary schools in Rongo sub-county. The rationale behind this study was that, underage pregnancy is on the rise despite the implementation of life skills education in both primary and secondary schools in Kenya. Life skills are psychosocial competencies which should enable an individual to effectively deal with demands and challenges in life. The escalating numbers of underage pregnancies disclose that minimal attention is directed towards adolescents transfer of life skills from classroom to real life situations. The study adopted qualitative methods to collect data from students and teachers in 3 public secondary schools in Rongo Sub-County using focus group discussions, interviews, and participant observation. 50 students and six teachers sampled through purposive, quota and chain techniques participated in the focus groups and individual interviews. The data was analysed thematically using manual open coding and NVivo 11 software and the results were presented in a narrative form, illustrated by direct quotes, mind maps and tables. The study revealed that, there was a relationship between the communication strategies used by the teachers in life skills classrooms and the acquisition, retention and consequently application of life skills in real life. The reason the students still suffer from the consequences of sexual risk taking was partly attributed to the teacher centred strategies used in life skills education. The study also revealed that those students who have interacted one on one with the teachers especially in guidance and counselling have exhibited change of behaviour which further emphasises that effective communication results in behaviour change. The study recommended urgent in service training of teachers of life skills on participatory strategies and infrastructural developments in schools to facilitate participation.

KEYWORDS : Life skills, Communication strategies, sexual risk taking, underage pregnancy.

1.INTRODUCTION

This article in broad sense examines the relationship between communication and life skills acquisition, retention and application by secondary school students. Specifically, it evaluates the effectiveness of communication strategies used in life skills education for underage pregnancy prevention in Rongo Sub-County. In teaching and learning, effective communication plays a key role. That kind of personal and conversational interaction that exists between teacher and learner is a crucial aspect in the learning process (Barnes, 1992). Barnes further argues that, the children fail in school not because they have difficulty with the language but instead, because of the inhibiting effects of rigid and formalised methods of teaching which are often in opposition to the natural inquiry which children develop outside the school. (Yarker, 2016), identifies the importance of pupil engagement if learning is to be effective and explores some of the patterns of communication which enhance such engagements. As such, learners' acquisition and production of knowledge depends entirely on the premise that is essentially dependent on the effectiveness of communication. (Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur, & Prendergast, 1997), posit that younger adolescents and their teachers talking together, compose shared understanding that contributes to individual student's learning. Therefore, people learn by participating in communication exchanges.

Education is the means by which individuals are equipped with knowledge and skills and values to enable them become productive citizens. Education serves moral, societal, political and economic ends. The purpose of schooling should therefore be tied to the pressing problems of the contemporary society. According to (Tyler, 2013), the school is the agency for helping the young people to deal effectively with critical challenges of everyday life. These challenges include among others, negative peer pressure, gender bias, violence, early marriages, teenage pregnancies, indiscipline, and school unrest, poor career choices, school dropouts, poor performances, early sexual onset, drug and substances abuse, rape, incest, suicide and HIV and AIDS pandemic (KIE, 2002b). To help the students navigate through the challenges of everyday life, the Ministry of Education through the Kenya Institute of curriculum Development (KICD) developed the Life Skills Education (LSE) curriculum.

Life Skills Education has been adopted in many countries around the world as a means to empower the youth in challenging situations with various degrees of success. United States of America initiated several Life Skills programs for the prevention of drugs and substance abuse, and violence in schools and colleges. UNICEF (2006), indicates that in

South Asia, Life Skills programmes in general are helping learners make better choices targeting risky behaviours and situations. Studies conducted in India found out that, life skills education was effective in preventing a wide range of problems such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, violence, low self-esteem among others (Prajapati, Sharma, & Sharma, 2017)). In Africa, Life Skills Education has been adopted as a measure to equip learners with various skills in an attempt to promote acceptable attitudes and behaviour in countries such as Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Swaziland (UNICEF, 2006). These studies concluded that, life skills education, has a positive effect and improves social development, emotional and social adjustments suggesting an increase in compatibility of adolescents and public health.

In secondary schools in Kenya, life skills are taught once a week in every class as a stand-alone subject. Moreover, it has been integrated to various degrees in other subjects such as Religious Education and biology. In the wake of sexual violence, underage pregnancy, early exposure to sex and lack of parental involvement in navigating the changes associated with adolescence, Life Skills Education was deemed a necessary and accurate source of information on sexuality to students as it equipped the students with skills such as, assertiveness, refusal and negotiation skills and decision making skills. Sex education is therefore one of the major components of LSE. Therefore, LSE content when implemented well, can impact youth behaviours in a way that improves SRH outcomes.

However, students in the country are not yet prepared for the choices, they make especially in sexual relationships due to the escalating numbers of underage pregnancies despite life skills implementation in secondary schools (Shirao, Momanyi, & Anyona, 2020). Underage pregnancy is a global problem, with considerable side effects on the lives of both mother and infant (Daniels, 2015; Organization, 2018; Socolov et al., 2017). In Kenya, almost a quarter of Kenyan women give birth by the age of 18, and nearly half by the age of 20. Statistics on adolescents (between ages 15 and 19 years in secondary schools) put teen pregnancy and motherhood rates in Kenya at 18%. About 1 in every 5 adolescent girls has either had a live birth, or is pregnant with her first child. Rates increase rapidly with age: from 3% among girls at 15 yrs. old, to 40% among girls at 19 yrs. old. The situation varies across counties; with some counties seeing higher rates than others (Miriti, Mberia, & Ngula, 2020; Organization, 2018).

Rongo Sub-County has a school dropout rate of 43% percent which is higher compared to other sub counties in Migori (MOEST, Rongo Sub-

County office, 2020) majorly due to underage pregnancy. Two studies conducted in Rongo Sub-County found out that, pregnancy is one of the major reasons for school dropout (Nyakan, Oguta, & Getange, 2015; Omollo & Yambo, 2017). To realise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Kenya, it is important to mitigate the number of teen pregnancies in the country. When adolescent girls grow up healthy and are able to go to school, they are more likely to escape poverty, and this would expedite the progression of social and economic status of their families and society (Griggs et al., 2013).

If Life Skills Education offers valuable psychosocial skills but does not adequately respond to reproductive issues in the face of an explosive media driven youth culture that revolves around sexuality (Strasburger, Jordan, & Donnerstein, 2010), what could be the problem? The psychosocial aim of life skills education requires a formulation of the curriculum that goes beyond the dissemination of information to the development of the whole individual in terms of behaviour, attitudes and values (UNICEF, 2012). Building skills and changing attitudes may work best by implementing participatory teaching methods. Effective communication strategies, are considered to be influential and critical in facilitating shifts in attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and behaviour (Organization, Staff, & UNAIDS, 2003). The discrepancy between life skills implementation in Kenya and the transfer of skill knowledge to real life situation by the Kenyan youth triggered the researcher to conduct this study.

Theoretical framework

The study is guided by the Health Belief Model theory which posits that, a person's likelihood to warm up to the recommended health behaviour depends on their belief in the threat of the disease to their health and the effectiveness of the suggested change of behaviour in infection prevention. strategy (Strecher & Rosenstock, 1997). Life skills knowledge in the context of this study is a pregnancy prevention strategy which so far is not making its intended impact due to low levels of acquisition, retention and application in real life situation. The strategy (LSE) was intended to increase the teenagers' awareness of; (a) the probability of personally becoming pregnant or causing a partner to be pregnant (susceptibility) (b) the serious negative personal consequences of teenage pregnancy (severity) (c) the personal and interpersonal benefits of delayed or protected sexual activity (benefits) (d) decrease their perception to barriers to abstinence and consistent use of protection (barriers). Communication strategies like cooperate learning, case studies, role plays, modelling among others have been found to yield high returns in the acquisition of life skills critical in triggering behaviour change/self-efficacy (Bayyat, Orabi, & Abu Altaieb, 2016). The communication strategies are therefore the stimuli or cue to action in the acquisition of life skills. By understanding the factors that influence the health choices people make, programs like life skills can tackle ways to reduce barriers, improve knowledge and help feel more motivated and at ease to take action. In this study, HBM was used to better understand teenagers' beliefs and health behaviour towards underage pregnancy while at the same time highlight the role of communication strategies in LSE as a program to trigger behaviour change in learners.

2.METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in three public secondary schools in Rongo Sub-County. The schools are referred to as; A, B and C. the schools were conveniently chosen first, because they are county schools and therefore draw students from within the county. Further, they were selected based on the nature of school i.e., a pure girls school, a boy only school and a mixed school.

This research goes beyond merely describing characteristics to analysing and explaining how the phenomenon under study is happening. It therefore, adopted a qualitative approach. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies in the acquisition of psycho social competencies in life skills education which is a sociological process, a thorough inquiry was deemed necessary.

The sample for the study consisted of teachers and students from the three schools whose target population was 1870. The study employed purposive, quota and chain sampling techniques. The purposive technique was used to obtain the teachers sample whose selection criteria was that they teach life skills either as a standalone subject, integrated in other subjects or as a provision for guidance and counselling.

Quota was used to categorise students according to class and gender. It was believed that the syllabus coverage in life skills increases from one level to the next and therefore, the data was gathered from students from form one, to three. At the time of inquiry, the form four students were not present in school. Gender factor was very crucial in this inquiry. Even though the boys do not get pregnant, their perspective is very important in the mitigation process for underage pregnancy. Chain sampling was used to identify special students who are pregnant or have given birth in the recent past.

A combination of methods of data collection was employed; focus group discussion, interviews, voice recording and participant observation. This was necessary for obtaining different views and to ensure valid and reliable results. The different perspectives were also needed for the study to be holistic, comprehensive and contextualised (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007).

Six teachers participated in individual interviews while 50 students in eight focus groups.

The data so generated was analysed thematically using manual open coding and NVivo 11 software and presented in a narrative, backed by raw data quotes and tables where applicable.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. effectiveness of communication strategies

objectives of life skills education to learners	Level of life skill acquisition among learners	Learner Preparedness to deal with challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain knowledge of their sexuality Learn how to take precaution in case of sexual encounters able to say no to sexual advances learn what sex is and how to abstain and say no to sexual activities protect themselves from the consequences of irresponsible sexual behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very low -Rarely taught (time table not followed life skills lessons used to cover syllabus for other subjects) -left for teachers and the school only (parents and other stakeholders are not involved) -left to guidance and counselling (only students in trouble are taught) -Teaching methods are lecture and question and answer, discussion, one on one interaction brainstorming rarely used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners are unprepared, grappling with challenges premarital sex Alcohol and drug abuse Diseases e.g S.T.I, HIV Aids Unplanned Pregnancy Abortion School drop out Stress

The table above summarises the findings on the effectiveness of communication strategies in life skills education for underage pregnancy prevention in secondary schools in Rongo sub-county.

Firstly, the results from the study shows that there is existence of a life skills curriculum in the three schools under study. From the interview findings, all the three schools, A, B and C have life skills timetabled either as a standalone subject or stroked with physical education. While school A has life skills stroked with PE, school B and C have in their time tables LS a lone. In all the three schools, LS appears once a week in a forty minutes' lesson in all classes from one to four. In all the schools, the teachers assigned to handle these classes are not necessarily trained teachers of life skills.

But it also emerged that what most respondents perceived that life skills curriculum, is actually guidance and counselling, which in most cases reach out to students who are already in trouble or those who voluntarily seek these services.

Life skills are taught mostly in guidance and counselling and as

integrated in other subjects. I am in charge of guidance and counselling and I organise counselling sessions where I take the students through life skills. (Teacher Respondent)

Another respondent who notably believed that life skills was synonymous with guidance and counselling emphasised that in guidance and counselling they only attend to a few students.

... Teaching life skills doesn't impact much on their lives. Besides in guidance and counselling, only a few students who are already in trouble are taught. If it is made a compulsory subject and probably examinable then it can make an impact. (Teacher Respondent)

It should be noted that Life skills curriculum was introduced to schools because of the failure of guidance and counselling programs to cater for the needs of all the students (Ndirangu, Wamue-Ngare, & Wango, 2013). Yet in schools, findings reveal that guidance and counselling departments are more vibrant than the teaching of life skills as a subject.

Secondly, the study found out that most students engage in sexual relationships with dire consequences. Most boy respondents acknowledged that most of them engage in sex due to peer influence. While girls are also driven into sex through peer pressure, majority engage in transactional sex because of poverty. One of the girls intimated that;

Personally, it is during corona holiday that I had sex. I was doing a lot of hawking, maize and sometimes ground nuts. My mom is a single mother and she does not have work so I had to help. Most people who buy my maize or groundnuts are bodaboda guys. I take them maize they buy all of them, then I don't have anything to do the whole day that's how I got involved. (Student Respondent)

The interview corroborates the FGDs that premarital sex is the major challenge that students are suffering from. When asked their opinion why they think their students are still suffering from poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes despite the implementation of life skills education, one teacher respondent had this to say;

The students are not taught earlier in life. When they go home, they engage in sexual activities and parents do not bother. Some because of poverty are engaged in transactional sex. These bodaboda guys are their main clients, a ride or a packet of chips and our girls pay with their bodies. There's a time we forbade our students from riding in bodaboda but still, we cannot live with them in their homes. In this mixed school, students have relationship amongst themselves and have sex with abandon. (Teacher Respondent)

From these findings, it is evident that the dominant challenge that most students are facing is premarital sex. This resonates with, (WANJIKU, 2017) research findings which showed that students are still involved in peer related behaviour including drug abuse, theft, examinations malpractice, bullying, violence, strikes and illicit sexual relationships despite the efforts to impart life skills to students in school. With the escalating underage pregnancy a problem both globally and in Kenya, with considerable side effects on the lives of both mother and infant (Daniels, 2015; Organization, 2018; Socolov et al., 2017), these findings attest to the fact that premarital sex together with its attendant consequences is still a major challenge that the students face despite life skills implementation in secondary schools.

Life skills education aims at change of behaviour, attitudes and values (WHO, 1997, KICD 2008 (Strecher & Rosenstock, 1997). Both teachers and students agreed that life skills can enhance positive changes in learners. The findings from interviews reveal that life skills main objective is to enrich all aspects of life through enhancing behavioural changes, character building and self-satisfaction for survival in the contemporary society.

Although both students and teacher have the knowledge of the aims and objectives of life skills, these are yet to be met in the three schools under study. When asked what role life skills play in enhancing positive changes in their learners majority of the teachers agree that life skills indeed play a big role in arresting students' unrests and tame the escalating number of teenage pregnancies. However, they were quick

to point out that this could only be possible if students acquired specific skills such as assertiveness and decision making.

A very big role. If what has happened to my students who have learnt some life skills is anything to go by, then I believe life skills can arrest the students' unrests and tame the escalating number of teenage pregnancy. But this could only happen if these lessons are given earlier in life and taught uniformly in all the schools. (Teacher Respondent)

Another teacher respondent also believes that life skills in deed plays a big role;

If the learners acquire the skills like assertion and decision making, it can help them a lot with relationships. I always advise my students and especially girls to have guts to communicate their minds to avoid being used by the other gender. (Teacher Respondent)

From the FGDs, this theme explored the students' awareness of life skill education and why they should learn it. Most respondents indicated they had knowledge of it and indicated reasons for learning the subject. However, findings from FGDs, reveal two main perspectives on the role played by life skills to enhance positive changes in learners. The first group were in agreement that life skills indeed plays a positive role. On the other hand, the second group was more concerned with the timing of these life skills lessons and therefore in agreement with the teachers' sentiments that at secondary school, it was late to start introducing certain life skills. The students like their teachers indicated that the success of LS education lies on early teaching especially from primary school and at home.

"You see, these lessons come to us late in life when most of us have done these damaging things. Right now in form three, they can only help those boys who are still green and have not experimented with things". Student Respondent.

When asked whether they have learnt some sex education at home, majority of the respondent say they wish their parents were more open with them on such matters.

My parents cannot even speak to me about such things, my father is so harsh and even me I don't want any friction with my parents. My dad is unapproachable. I am close with my mom but my mind has never directed me to speak about these things. (Student respondent)

In addition to the challenges students face, the findings from the interviews indicated that parents have remained spectators and left parental role to teachers. This happens as children engage in sexual activities with parents knowledge influenced by poverty levels that sometimes lead to transactional sex. This is alluded to the fact that most girls get pregnant during holidays compared to school days. The results from the interviews resonates with the students' views on parental guidance in sex education. The teacher respondents blamed the parents of absconding their duties of teaching their children life skills especially on sexuality.

Ours being a mixed school, our major problem is boy girl relationships and relationships from outside school. I cannot say that we have managed to curb the problem but at least we have tried and especially when students are in school. When our students came from corona holidays, some of our girls got pregnant. It's obvious that parents have absconded if the statistics of teenage pregnancy in the public domain is true. And even our students who are expectant and others who have given birth would have not fallen victims if the parents were actively involved in inculcating morals in their children. (Teacher Respondent)

Parental irresponsibility on sex education waters down the skills the students have acquired in schools and therefore making the application of skill knowledge to real life situation difficult. The study established that Students preferred being in school rather than home. This could be because they spend most of their time with teachers and they can freely open up to them than their parents. Teachers are viewed by students as trusted and respected sources of information, and are commonly approached by students with health-related and/or sensitive issues (Ollis & Meldrum, 2014). Teacher involvement in sensitive

issues leads to more effective education than when children are informed on these issues by parents alone (Cohen, & Randall, 2012). For instance, it is known that school-based sexuality programs are valued by parents and make the discussion of sexual issues at home an easier process. Parent-child discussions of sensitive issues are also stimulated by school-based child protection programs (Hawkins & Briggs, 2015).

At home, the study revealed that girls are more vulnerable and are prone to premarital sex leading to consequences including underage pregnancies. This assertion supported by (Bewa, 2021) whose study on school closure and students pregnancy posited that consensual sex appeared to have seen a sharp increase when schools were closed because of covid19 citing idleness and boredom as the main reasons for increased sexual activities among teenagers.

From the finding discussed above, it is evident that the kind of trust that exist between a teacher and a learner will contribute to acquisition and retention of knowledge. This trust is achieved by effective communication. This emphasised by Ryan when he posits that, since the family is increasingly becoming unstable and unpredictable the teacher and the school remain the only environment where holistic development of the individual may take place (Ryan, 2001). This assertion is supported by two recent studies whose findings support students being in school is much safer since school closure affect them in various ways (Burzynska & Contreras, 2020; Villegas, Peirolo, Rocca, Ipince, & Bakrania, 2021)

For life skills education to make impacts on the lives of the students, there is need for concerted efforts from all the stakeholders of which parents are key players as they are in the most immediate layer of an individual's environment which also comprise the family, school, peers, religious institutions and neighbours (Härkönen, Bernardi, & Boertien, 2017). In the development of a child, it is important for them to have long-term mutual interaction with adults who have a stake in the development of the child, and the parents have a higher stake.

Further, in attempt to find out whether the skills acquired in life skills education help learners to prevent the consequences of sexual risk taking and especially underage pregnancy it was established that the level of life skills acquisition is very low. The students are still exposed to challenges arising from sexual relationships with dire consequences such as, underage pregnancies leading to school dropout or abortions, and STIs. Some respondents blamed the syllabus inadequacy as the reasons for low levels of life skills acquisition.

When asked whether their knowledge in life skills can help in the prevention of the consequences of sexual risk taking and especially underage pregnancy, the students fell into two main groups. The first group were sceptical because they believed that what they are taught in life skills do not address the real challenges they are facing the teachers were accused of emphasizing on abstinence at the expense of protection. One such respondent said that;

life skills doesn't help much because most of the times the teachers talk about us avoiding sex; they do not tell us how to protect ourselves against diseases and how not to make a girl pregnant. Most of them think that we do not play sex and therefore we can abstain. (Student Respondent)

Another respondent with the same opinion said that;

Life skills lessons should emphasize on refusal and negotiation skills. The girls normally go to older people for sex because they lack basic things. If the girls are faced with older men for transactional sex, they can negotiate the use of protection or even have the courage to refuse. The parents should also be responsible and provide their girls with basic needs. (Student Respondent)

The second group believed that life skills can help them navigate these challenges, however, they were in agreement with the first group on the account that they are not taught life skills early enough and in the right way and that is the reason why they cannot apply them.

Life skills can help but if teachers take their time and if it is taught from an early age. Those girls who are already doing sex cannot be helped by being told to abstain. I believe life skills can help us. The problem is teachers do not take it seriously and sometimes it is not taught at all. (Student Respondent)

Others of the same opinion also felt that since most students in high school are already sexually active, the teachers of life skills should stop preaching abstinence;

If people have enough knowledge especially on how to prevent diseases and pregnancy, then this thing can be avoided. The children should be taught about sex early enough in high school, most students have done it. If they teach us this life skill right from primary school, then we can gain from them. And I believe that people should stop preaching to us about abstinence. They should teach us how to protect ourselves from the consequences of sex just like the teacher in dream girl. (Student Respondent)

Here students raise issues about the timing and the adequacy of the syllabus to equip them with the right skills to navigate through challenges to do with the problem of premarital sex. The teachers' interviews revealed similar findings as that of the FGDs with regard to syllabus inadequacy, emphasis on abstinence and that the children are not taught early enough. A respondent became very emotional when asked Why they think students are still suffering from poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes despite being taught life skills had this to say;

I believe it is because they have not acquired adequate life skills. They are not being told the truth by the adults. Can you imagine that the society still believe that students should be preached for abstinence when they can easily be taught about the contraceptives and how to negotiate their use? These children are not virgins, madam, truth be told. You cannot insist that a child who started having sex in primary school should abstain. But I believe if they are knowledgeable about how to protect themselves from the ugly consequences of premarital sex, then they will be helped! (Teacher Respondent)

These findings are in agreement with a report on stakeholders perspectives on life skills implementation in Kenya out that, all stakeholders including, parents, teachers, students and education officials were grateful for the inclusion of Life skills curriculum in schools However, parents, teachers and education officials felt that the students needed sexuality education from an early age to overcome the life challenges they face including sexual violence, early exposure to sex, and lack of parental guidance in navigating changes associated with adolescence. (Musungu, Chang'ach, & Simwa).

Thirdly, respondents alluded to the teaching methodologies as the reasons for low levels of life skills acquisition. When asked whether they believed their communication strategies yielded high returns in terms of life skills acquisition, teacher' respondents were in agreement that life skills acquisition largely depends on the communication strategies;

Your communication approach will determine how much information you will gain. I remember I didn't do well in mathematics simply because of how the teacher communicated with us. I try my best to be friendly to my students lets they develop a negative attitude like I did. I believe the level of acquisition is low because the learners are not actively involved in the process. When the students are involved in the learning process they gain more than when they are just sitting there and doing the listening. It is true with other subjects. I believe it is the same with life skills. (Teacher Respondent)

Teachers also believed that their communication strategies can endear them to their learners or not. One of the respondents intimated that the students trust them more than they trust their parents because of the way they communicate to them;

The way you communicate some of these things would determine whether they are heeded or not. I tell you, these students appreciate those who are not harsh and those who handle them with a lot of care. Why do you think some of them do not trust their parents? Because they quarrel them and shout at them. (Teacher Respondent)

The results from the FGDs corroborates the interview findings on the effectiveness of teaching methodologies. When asked whether they believe the methods used by their teachers adequately help them to acquire life skills, the respondents felt that their involvement in the

learning process would yield better returns.

"Well to some extent. Because they give us information. But I feel that if they could involve us in the discussion or call us for individual consultation then they could help a lot". (Student Respondent)

Other students felt that life skills should not be taught like other subjects;

Life skills lessons should be made lively, may be group discussion like, one of us said they do it in church. Not the way they teach mathematics or chemistry. The students should be given time to air their views on these things that affect them rather than being told this is white and the other is black. (Student respondent)

Life Skills Education is intended to help learners demonstrate ability to apply the relevant life skills in dealing with emerging issues and other challenges effectively (KIE, 2008; Sikuku, 2013). From this study however, the students are still unable to apply the life skills they have acquired in class to real life situations as attested by the escalating number of underage pregnancy (Organization, 2018). This study is in agreement (Musungu et al.) who found out that, parents, teachers and education officials felt that the students needed sexuality education from an early age to overcome the life challenges they face including sexual violence, early exposure to sex, and lack of parental guidance in navigating changes associated with adolescence.

This study highlights the inadequacy of the curriculum to address the needs of students who are already sexually active. On the same note, (Jegannathan, Dahlblom, & Kullgren, 2014), posit that if the goal of life skills education is to promote safe sex, the efficacy beliefs and skills related to condom use as well as proper communication skills on how to communicate with one's partner on adopting safer sex should be included. The study further found out that, when values and attitudes are shared in schools, the teaching methods reported by the teachers and the students is often a lecture and not discussion. As such, students are able to recite values such as humility, honesty and self-esteem but when asked which of these values are important to them as opposed to those valued by others, they struggle.

Life Skills programmes in general are helping learners make better choices targeting risky behaviours and situations in developed countries (Nasheeda, Abdullah, Krauss, & Ahmed, 2019) in Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe which have adopted the Life Skills Education as a measure to equip learners with various skills in an attempt to promote acceptable attitudes and behaviour (UNICEF, 2006). Studies from countries such as Nigeria, Malawi, Uganda and South Africa which had the highest HIV and AIDS prevalence rate (National population Commission, 2008) also implemented life skills education in schools with various levels of success. Two separate studies conducted in India found out that, life skills education was effective in preventing a wide range of problems such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, violence, low self-esteem among others (Prajapati et al., 2017)). The studies concluded that, life skills education has a positive effect and improves social development, emotional and social adjustments suggesting an increase in compatibility of adolescents and public health.

However, from this study findings life skills education is not making the intended impact partly because of the syllabus inadequacy, lack of parental involvement together with other stakeholders and largely because of the communication strategies that do not support learners' involvement and hence limited skill knowledge acquisition and consequently, no retention and application.

4.CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that, there is a direct link between communication strategies use in life skills education and the acquisition, retention and application of life skills by the students to deal with life challenges including underage pregnancy prevention. The teachers of life skills in the three schools do not involve students in the learning process through the use of participatory strategies. There is little input of other stakeholders in sex education of the youth. As a result, the learners' levels of life skills acquisition are low and this explains the escalating numbers of underage pregnancies among secondary students in Rongo Sub-County.

5.RECOMMENDATIONS

For adequate implementation of LS, the ministry of education should

formulate a policy for the subject to be made compulsorily examinable. The teaching of life skills require involvement of all stakeholders so as to be effective, so the community, churches and parents should be involved in the inculcation of morals to the youths. To enhance creativity in teaching of life skills, resources such as projectors and teaching aids should be availed by the school administration for learners to embrace the subject.

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