

Perceptions of Students on Aspects of Sex Education in the Christian Religious Education Curriculum in Kenya

Hellen Sitawa Wanyonyi,
Department of Social Sciences, University of Eldoret
hsitawa@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper describes the perceptions of students on aspects of Sex Education in the Christian Religious Education (C.R.E) curriculum with a view to determining how best their views can be incorporated in suggestions for a more comprehensive sex education curriculum. Ten (10) form four students taking C.R.E as an examinable subject were chosen as respondents on perception from twenty secondary schools. The total sample population was therefore two hundred (200) students. Knowledge and adequacy formed the basic parameters of measuring the students' perceptions of aspects of SE in the C.R.E. curriculum. Data was collected mainly through questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions. For questionnaires to be effective, each respondent was expected to respond to questions independently to establish their individual sexual behavior and perceptions. Interviews were guided by specific questions and allowed free flowing discussions. During the discussions, in-depth probing was used by the researcher for clarification of points and ideas. The study findings revealed that over 75% of the Students perceived the learning of SE in C.R.E as important. They believed that they needed to learn SE in a religious context in line with their Christian teachings and values. This suggests that SE must be related to moral values. There is therefore need for a more comprehensive SE that appreciates the role of learners in determining its success.

Key Words: Perception, Sex education, C.R.E Curriculum, Knowledge, Sexual behaviour.

1.0 Introduction

The effectiveness of a curriculum in achieving the desired goals is dependent upon input from all stakeholders, including learners. It is notable that in Kenya, the views of learners have rarely been sought and yet they are the key consumers (Nganda, 2004). This paper describes the perceptions of students on aspects of Sex Education in the C.R.E curriculum with a view to determining how best their views can be incorporated in suggestions for a more comprehensive sex education curriculum. For purposes of this study, Perception has three major components: the perceiver, the target and the situation. The youth in secondary schools constitute the perceiver; the aspects of SE are the target while the curriculum in school forms the situation. The study of perceptions is quite crucial especially in the making of ethical decisions geared towards improvement of service delivery. In this case, understanding students' perceptions will lead to improved ways of creating awareness on aspects of SE to serve the intended purpose of shaping youth sexual behavior.

To measure perception, it is important to understand the purpose of learning SE which can be derived from the objectives of learning C.R.E in the secondary school's curriculum in Kenya. SE seeks to assist young people in developing a positive view of sexuality. It provides them with knowledge and skills about taking care of their sexual health and helps them to make sound decisions now and in the future (Nganda (2004)). From the integration of aspects of SE in the

C.R.E curriculum, it is expected that students have formed- opinions on the knowledge gained and the adequacy and application of these aspects to their real life situations.

As young people are the main targets of SE programs, getting their views about the aspects of SE offered in the curriculum could influence the direction and content of such programs. Seeking the participants' voice is also important in a study because education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories (Connelly& Clandinin (1990)). In addition, the personal experiences as told by the participants elucidate experiences of success and frustration as defined by the participants themselves. It is therefore important to determine the views of the students concerning SE in order to develop sexual health programs that address their own understanding of sexuality and their sexual health needs to control youth sexual behavior.

In this study, knowledge and adequacy form the basic parameters of measuring the students' perceptions of aspects of SE in the C.R.E. curriculum. The influence of religion on the perception of students was also discussed in view of the fact that these aspects have been integrated in a religious context (C.R.E.). There are questions that are more general to the whole content of the aspects of SE while others constitute an in-depth analysis geared towards testing the perceptions of the students on specific aspects of SE in the C.R.E curriculum. For each question, respondents are asked to respond by choosing an answer from a range of possibilities then results are computed and tabulated. Focus group discussions and in depth-probing are also used for clarification of issues. This eventually leads to general discussions and conclusions. Ten (10) form four students who take C.R.E as an examinable subject from twenty schools represent respondents on perception. The total sample population is therefore two hundred (200) students.

1.1 Students' general knowledge

It was important for the study to establish the students' knowledge and awareness of aspects of SE in Christian Religious Education Syllabus. This is because some aspects of SE have been infused in the curriculum but the Ministry of Education is not explicit on its policy of teaching SE in schools in Kenya. Respondents were to give their personal views on whether SE is taught in the school curriculum or not.

1.1.1 Awareness of the teaching of SE

The main objective here was to determine the knowledge of the students on the aspects of SE in the curriculum. Respondents were asked to state whether aspects of SE are taught in the C.R.E. curriculum or not. The results indicate that a high percentage of the respondents (65.5%) are aware that aspects of SE are taught in the C.R.E. curriculum. 23.0% of the respondents are not sure whether they are taught SE while 11.5% deny that SE is not taught in C.R.E. The significant percentage of those who are not sure and those who deny (34.5%) may point to the manner in which the aspects of SE have been implemented by simply infusing and integrating the content in the C.R.E curriculum without clearly stating that SE is being taught. This silence is likely to cause confusion among the students. As earlier noted, the Ministry of Education should come out clear on its policy on SE to avoid such confusion among students. Education that respects and empowers young people has more integrity than education based on incomplete information, fear and shame. SE needs to be accurate and truthful in order to have immediate relevance for later life. The situation contradicts the findings in Nganda's article on the guidelines for comprehensive SE conducted in the United States of America(Nganda, 2004)

1.1.2 Ability to identify aspects of SE in C.R.E.

The study further set out to determine the students' ability to identify the topics that are covered under SE in the C.R.E. curriculum. This was important because the respondent's ability level to identify the aspects of SE as offered in the curriculum would later be used to determine their perceptions on the same. In addition, although the researcher had prior knowledge of what is covered under aspects of SE in the C.R.E curriculum, it was important for the students themselves to identify these aspects in order to make the study student centered. Through focus group discussion, respondents were asked to identify the aspects of SE that are taught in C.R.E. The responses indicate that they are generally in a position to identify the aspects of SE covered in the C.R.E curriculum but their ability to name the topics varies. 91% of the respondents were able to identify human sexuality, life skills and irresponsible sexual behavior as aspects of SE covered in the C.R.E curriculum. This finding therefore indicates that the topics of human sexuality, life skills and irresponsible sexual behavior are the most popularly identified topics by the students under aspects of SE taught in C.R.E. This finding concurs with Francoeur & Noonan's views when they note;

When tested in 2000 on sexuality topics—menstruation, pregnancy, contraception, STDs, and AIDS—80% of the adolescents had received instruction on at least one topic. However, further testing on specific issues showed that only 23 to 37% had the ability to identify fully the content covered. (2004:5)

Note that the underlying suggestion here seems to be that although students are taught aspects of SE in the C.R.E curriculum, not all are in a position to fully identify the content covered.

2. Perception on knowledge gained from the aspects of SE

The researcher sought to establish the perceptions of the respondents on the knowledge gained from the aspects of SE. Having identified the various aspects, respondents were to state whether they agree or disagree that they have gained knowledge out of their exposure to the aspects of SE. The responses reveal that most students perceive themselves as having gained knowledge out of their exposure to the aspects of SE. This is revealed by 73% of the respondents agreeing that they have indeed gained knowledge from learning the aspects. 22% of the respondents do not acknowledge having gained knowledge from the aspects while 5% did not comment. This finding indicates a positive perception among respondents on the parameter of knowledge. The responses also suggest some knowledge gaps among students in the aspects of SE as revealed by those who perceive themselves as not having gained knowledge from the aspects. Mugisha & Zulu (2004) while commenting on youth knowledge levels and sexual behavior note that, knowledge gaps persist and behavior change is below expectations among youth in secondary schools in Kenya.

In view of this, there is great need to reinforce the teaching of the content to fill the knowledge gap that exists among students for them to effectively appreciate the aspects taught. The findings highlight the need to actively promote knowledge and awareness on aspects of SE in C.R.E to make the aspects more relevant and effective for behavior change.

1.2.1 Perceptions on pre-marital sex and misconceptions on SE.

Having established a positive perception among respondents on the parameter of knowledge, the researcher further sought to establish the perceptions of the respondents on the practice of pre-marital sex and the misconceptions held on various aspects of SE. Pre-marital sex as an aspect was of key interest to the study because it was expected that the knowledge gained from learning the

aspects of SE as perceived by the students would bring about behavior change. Pre-marital sex is also considered as the root cause of the other sexual related misdemeanor such as pregnancy, abortion and the STD's including HIV/AIDS. First, the researcher wanted to evaluate the perceptions of respondents on pre-marital sex in the process of their exposure to aspects of SE. Respondents were asked to state whether pre-marital sex is morally wrong or right among youth. The responses show that majority of youth (97.5%) perceive pre-marital sex as morally wrong while only 2.5 % of the sample account for those who did not comment. This indicates that almost all youth in the sample perceive pre-marital sex as morally wrong, yet youth indulge in sex at varying levels with over 66% of the respondents indicating that they are sexually active with some having multiple partners. This findings compares relatively well with the findings by (Kamaara, 2005)

These findings further initiated the need to determine the extent at which student's approve pre-marital sex. This was out of the concern that despite the students knowing that the practice is morally wrong, they still engage in sexual activities. Students were asked to state their views on pre-marital sex ranging from always disapprove, to sometimes or always approve pre-marital sex. The responses show that 59% of the respondents either always approve or sometimes approve pre-marital sex while only 28% of the respondents in the sample population claim that they always disapprove it. 13% account for those that did not respond. These findings indicate that although almost all respondents perceive pre-marital sex as morally wrong, majority of them are not opposed to the idea of having sex. The presence of those who chose not to comment on their perception to pre-marital sex may indicate the unwillingness of some of the respondents to state their position on matters of sexuality especially when they know that what they do is contrary to what is expected of them by society. The results may further show that knowledge does not necessarily influence practice. For instance, it is expected that since they know that pre-marital is morally wrong, then majority of the respondents would avoid the practice but the findings indicate that they do not put into practice what they know. This may just be knowledge for the sake of the classroom.

Focus group discussions with the respondents also reveal that for most boys, their current relationships were just for "passing time" and to gain sexual prowess but never expected them to lead to marriage. Girls on the other hand claimed that they were committed and hoped to marry their current sexual partners whether they are their fellow boy students or older men looking for wives. The boy's responses point to the notion that men 'use' women for their own sexual gratification.

This probably happens because women have been socialised to be polite, submissive and to give in to men's sexual demands based on the belief that the boy may not prefer her for marriage if she is too assertive and argumentative. Such beliefs have encouraged sexual encounters among young people. By exposing youth to aspects of SE, it is expected that the knowledge gained should correct such beliefs. Youth need SE in order to be equipped with the skills to be able to discuss a wide range of moral, social and cultural attitudes and perspectives on sex and sexuality. The skills acquired should enable them to differentiate between accurate and inaccurate information.

In addition, the study sought to establish the perceptions of the respondents with regard to the risks of pre-marital sex. The responses indicate pregnancy as the most perceived risk of pre-marital sex by the respondents with (43%) followed by the sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS (32%) while abortion and psychological problems were cited by 14% and 11% of the respondents respectively.

Given the youth's knowledge and perception on the risks of pre-marital sex, there is concern over their continued unsafe sexual practices and the associated morbidity. Hence, the relationship between what adolescents know and how they behave is perhaps the most salient issue. The aspects of SE as currently taught in C.R.E seem not to help in closing the gap between knowledge and practice. It is also expected that societal morals and values often embedded through socio-cultural experiences like religion should promote chastity and mould attitudes towards the individual youth and society. These eventually impacts on the youth's decision-making process on choices with regard to their sexual behavior.

Respondents were further asked to state their perceptions on the precautions against the identified risks. Respondents showed high knowledge level in naming the various precautions which were summed up as the use of contraceptives, abstinence and safe sex. Usually, condom use is commonly used to refer to "safe sex" but in the context of this study, the concept is particularly used to imply to the choice of respondents to engage in sexual activity during the safe period of a female's menstrual circle. Having mentioned the precautions, respondents were asked to choose the option that each considered the best against the identified risks of pre-marital sex. The responses are presented in table below.

Table 1: Precautions against risks of pre-marital sex.

Occurrence	Frequency	Percentage
Use of contraceptives	82	41
Abstinence	52	26
Safe sex	58	29
No response	08	4
Total	200	100

This table indicates that most respondents (41%) highly perceive the precaution of using contraceptives as the best to avoid the risks of pre-marital sex followed by safe sex (29%). Very few students (26%) consider the option of abstinence against the dangers of pre-marital sex. This poses greater risks to the youth as the practice of contraception among youth in secondary schools is a sensitive issue in Kenya; a country with strong religious leaning. Contraceptive knowledge among youth has been a sensitive issue faced by a lot of protest, and leaders remain apprehensive and uncomfortable about policies and legislation related to youth contraception. This policy leaves young people in an information vacuum because they are facing a culture radically different from the previous generations due to the increasing duration of schooling, late marriage, AIDS, and other STDs.

The idea of "safe sex" among youth on the other hand, may not work as most respondents seem not to accurately know the time in the menstrual circle when a woman is safe. Through focus group discussion, most respondents did not answer correctly the question; "what time in a woman monthly menstrual circle is she most likely to become pregnant?" This question was asked to determine whether respondents are able to identify the period when a woman is safe and the time when she is not safe. As a result, students may choose to have sex thinking that they are safe only to become victims of unwanted pregnancy. This may explain why pregnancies and abortions are increasing despite students having been exposed to aspects of SE in the C.R.E. curriculum that is meant to control their sexual behaviour.

In conclusion, it is established that most youth in the sample perceive pre-marital sex as morally wrong but they approve the practice of pre-marital sex as they are not opposed to the idea of having sex. Respondents are also aware of the consequences of pre-marital sex which include pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS, abortion and psychological problems. They identify pregnancy as posing the greatest risk followed by the sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS. Respondents further showed high knowledge in identifying the various precautions against the risks of pre-marital sex including the use of contraceptives, safe sex and abstinence. However, the majority prefer using contraceptives and safe sex which eventually poses danger to them as they are not accurate on the period in a woman's menstrual cycle when one is safe and at the same time, the practice of contraception among youth in secondary school is faced with a lot of protest.

This finding therefore indicates a gap between knowledge and practice. There is need to correct youth perceptions to pre-marital sex. Youth need to be encouraged through SE to embrace the option of abstinence against the risks of pre-marital sex but SE education should also take into consideration those who may not abstain to increase their knowledge on the available health safety measures.

Findings on respondent's knowledge on aspects of SE among the target population compares relatively well with the national (Kenya Demographic Health Survey, 2005) figure of 90%. This is not surprising as this finding is supported by many other studies that indicate that of the three; knowledge, perception and behavior; knowledge is the easiest to change, perception being more difficult, and behaviors being the most difficult. If SE is going to be effective therefore, there is need to include opportunities for young people to develop positive skills, attitudes and behavior for healthy sexual life, as it can be hard for them to adopt responsible sexual behavior on the basis of only having information. SE should include religious values and hence the role of religion in SE cannot also be overemphasized. Although the aspects are currently integrated in C.R.E, there is need for an explicit value based curriculum to bridge the disparity between knowledge, perception and practice in order to achieve the desired moral behaviour.

Despite the general knowledge and awareness among students and a positive perception on the parameter of knowledge among respondents, there is still lack of factual information. This promotes suspicion, unfounded myths and misconceptions. The various misconceptions held by the respondents are established through focused group discussions with the respondents. It is revealed for instance that very few students knew that a female could become pregnant even if she had sex only once. Respondents also indicated low knowledge on specific issues on reproductive health. For example, some did not know that onset of menstruation signalled the potential for a female to become pregnant.

Over 40% of the respondents were not aware that if a man took the birth control pill his partner could still become pregnant. The finding on youth's misconceptions on aspects of SE is supported by a survey of secondary school students in Kenya (KDHS 1989) which found out that only one in three males and one in four females knew that contraceptive pills had to be taken by the woman and not by the man. Even fewer knew that the pills had to be taken daily, not just before sex.

The focus group discussions also revealed that students generally believe that a woman cannot conceive during the menstrual periods. Still others believe that conception is not possible if a girl

has never menstruated. Such view points as held by the students are likely to be misleading and dangerous because it has medically been proven that conception is possible during menstrual cycle and even in cases where a girl has never menstruated before. As Kamaara (2005:70) rightly puts it:

Pregnancy in such cases is possible because the onset of fertility is not indicated by menstruation but by ovulation. A young woman who might be ovulating may conceive if she engages in sexual intercourse even though she has never menstruated.

Students also indicated 23% knowledge on the symptoms of HIV infection. They believe that healthy looking persons are HIV negative. They look for signs such as loss of weight, skin infections, persistent cough, tuberculosis (TB) as obvious symptoms of AIDS. They do not know that HIV and AIDS can only be confirmed by testing.

In view of such findings, it is concluded that it is out of such ignorance and misconception that youth end up with unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections including HIV. The misconceptions held by respondents show that the aspects of SE taught in C.R.E have not provided accurate and factual information to students on matters of sexuality. It is expected that the aspects taught would help in providing adequate knowledge needed to correct such misconceptions.

3. Perceptions on adequacy of the aspects of SE

In this section, the perceptions of the respondents are presented in view of the adequacy of the aspects of SE taught in the C.R.E. curriculum. The section provides opinions of the respondents on the importance of the aspects to their real life situations, their opinion on the adequacy of the content of the aspects, the effectiveness of the methods of teaching the aspects and whether the C.R.E teachers should be the ones to teach the aspects of SE. The responses are presented in the table below;

Table 2: Adequacy of the aspects of SE

Occurrence	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.
Exposure to SE is beneficial	90	40	90	45	20	10	200	100
Content adequate for Moral guidance	56	28	138	69	6	3	200	100
Methods of teaching effective	24	12	166	83	10	5	200	100
C.R.E teachers effective in teaching SE	66	33	122	66	12	6	200	100

It was important for the researcher to delve into the perceptions of the students towards the importance of learning the aspects of SE. This is because attitude can do or undo the learning process. Respondents were therefore asked to state whether their exposure to aspects of SE has assisted them. This was to test on the effectiveness of the aspects.

Results in Table 2 indicate that 45% of the respondents believe that their exposure to aspects of SE has assisted them while 45% account for those who think the aspects have not assisted them.

Another 10% of the respondents were undecided. The responses show mixed perceptions on the importance of learning the aspects of SE. There are those who feel that learning the aspects has assisted them but others feel that they have not benefited much from their exposure to the aspects. The mixed reactions may be interpreted to mean that the aspects taught do not adequately meet the needs and expectations of youth in secondary school to help control youth sexual behavior. It may also suggest that much of the knowledge gained as perceived by most students is not put into practice. There is need to enhance the teaching of SE in secondary schools to improve on the existing perceptions among students on the importance of learning the aspects in order to bring about positive change in behavior among students.

It is also expected that the knowledge gained in learning SE should be adequate for moral guidance in student's real life situations. Respondents were therefore asked to comment on whether the content of SE learned is adequate for moral guidance or not. The perceptions of the respondents presented in table 2 are that aspects of SE are not adequate for moral guidance as shown by 69% of the sample population saying that SE is not adequate for their moral guidance. Those who perceive the aspects as adequate for moral guidance, account for only 28% while 3.0% were undecided. Most students therefore perceive the aspects of SE as inadequate for moral guidance. This perception may partly be a reflection of why the aspects have not impacted positively on their behavior.

Respondents having noted that aspects of SE taught in the C.R.E curriculum are not adequate for moral guidance, it was important for the study to identify the various reasons why respondents perceive the aspects taught as inadequate for moral guidance. Through in depth oral interviews, respondents cited various reasons for the inadequacies which were summarized into four major inadequacies:

- a) The teaching of SE starts late in the fourth year and it is even not clear that students are learning SE.
- b) The aspects are not taught to correct behavior but for examination purpose.
- c) The aspects taught in C.R.E are not well discussed due to embarrassment by teachers to handle the content and the methodology of teaching does not involve the emotions of students.
- d) The methods used do not involve discussions, team activities and role play to capture their understanding.

Based on the fact that the SE aspects are taught late in the form four syllabus, it was noted that effective SE should start early, before young people reach puberty, and before they have developed established patterns of behavior. The precise age at which information should be provided depends on the physical, emotional and intellectual development of the young people as well as their level of understanding. Successful SE must therefore be designed to be age-appropriate so as to enable the youth to learn about, accept and adopt responsible behavior.

Respondents were further required to give views on how they perceive the methods of teaching the aspects and the providers of the content as indicated in table 2 above. Responses indicate that majority of the respondents (83%) perceive the methods as not effective while only 12% of the respondents claim that the methods are effective. Another 5% were undecided. This finding reveal that most respondents perceive negatively the methods used in teaching the aspects of SE.

Through focus group discussions with the students, it emerged that students have not fully conceptualized the aspects of SE because of the way the content is taught. The method commonly

used in teaching the aspects is the lecture method and students reiterated that this method is purely examination oriented aimed at making students pass the examinations and not to help them adopt responsible behavior. They also noted that the method does not touch on their emotions and real life situations as it is teacher centered.

Respondents acknowledged that the aspects are covered as C.R.E and not as SE. They also noted that they learn the aspects for the sake of taking the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (K.C.S.E) and therefore they do not see the aspects as means for moral guidance because the aspects are not value centered. More so, respondents said that the lecture method used does not allow the input of the students as it lacks discussions, team activities and role play to capture the understanding of the learners. This eventually hinders class room interaction as it is hard for students to discuss and ask questions. They noted that when they ask questions on particular issues in SE, they are referred to their biology teachers for clarification.

These views point to the fact that the methods used to teach the aspects tend to lack immediate relevance to the sexual behavior of youth because the aspects are not taught as a life skill enhancing subject. There is need therefore to allow the participation of students in the learning of SE in order to achieve the intended purpose of teaching SE. Evidence in Uganda for instance show that exposure to messages through various strategies and methods is the most effective way to change knowledge, perception and behaviors (Ntozi & Kirunga (1998)). There is need therefore to make the learning of SE in secondary schools more practical in order to yield positive impact on behavior.

Respondent's perceptions were also sought on their C.R.E teachers as providers of the content of the aspects of SE. Respondents were to give their opinion on whether C.R.E teachers should be the ones to provide SE or not. Results in table 2 above further show that 33% of the respondents perceived that C.R.E teachers should be the ones to provide SE. 61% disagreed that C.R.E teachers should not be the ones to teach SE. While 6% were undecided. This is an indication that the providers of the content are perceived negatively and as unreliable in providing the aspects of SE by the students. This negative perception by the students on the teachers is likely to affect the achievement of the objectives of teaching the aspects of SE because attitude can undo what is learned.

When probed to state reasons why they perceive negatively the C.R.E teachers, respondents said that in most cases, due to embarrassment by the C.R.E teachers, they are simply told to copy notes from text books on the aspects of SE. Some of the teachers are uncomfortable discussing sexuality issues with their students. This has made communication with the teacher difficult. This is likely because some teachers feel anxious about providing too much information or are embarrassed about not knowing answers to questions that students ask. It is no wonder C.R.E teachers are cited by students to refer SE issues to science teachers. This therefore leads to detaching SE from a moral frame work and religion. Students were also of the opinion that the C.R.E teachers are not particularly interested in their personalities and they do not serve as role models to be emulated by the students.

Honest and open communication between students and SE teachers can help lay the foundation for young people to mature into sexually healthy adults. Such an enormous task for the teacher would mean that he/she has adequate self-knowledge, is engaged in continuous human development and is comfortable with his/her own sexuality. These views are supported by Adams and Marshal (1998)

when they note that what is covered and how, depends on who is providing the SE, as well as what the individual young person wants to know about. Over and above, this study views school-based SE as complementing and augmenting the work of religious institutions, parents, community groups, and even health care professionals. The study stresses the need for learning institutions to fully accept the responsibility of strengthening SE. There is need to train C.R.E teachers in SE so as to handle the subject comfortably. The training of C.R.E teachers therefore needs to be restructured in view of producing SE teachers who are able to handle the subject with competence.

1.3.1 Application of the aspects

The knowledge gained in SE is expected to be used by the students to change self and others in behavior. Through this knowledge, students are expected to apply the knowledge to stay safe and to caution others about unsafe practices. Respondents were therefore asked to state whether they are able to overcome the challenges such as peer pressure using the knowledge gained from learning on the aspects of SE and to state whether the knowledge gained has encouraged them to caution others on unsafe practices. The study also sought to establish the perceptions of the respondents on whether SE encourages immorality or not and their opinion on whether SE can be improved on or not. The responses are indicated in table 3 below;

Table 3: Applicability of the aspects of SE

Occurrence	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.
Aspects have encouraged me to stay safe	48	24	127	63.5	25	12.5	200	100
Aspects have encouraged me to caution others	38	19	152	76	10	5	200	100
SE encourages immorality	25	12.5	157	78.5	18	9	200	100
Aspects taught can be improved on	168	84	21	10.5	11	5.5	200	100

From the responses, 63.5% of the respondents feel that learning the aspects of SE has not encouraged them to stay safe, 24% say that they are able to apply the knowledge to stay safe while 12.5% were undecided. These findings show that most of the students negatively perceive the aspects learned because they do not apply whatever is learned in real life situations and the aspects have not encouraged students to avoid risk behavior.

Respondents were also asked to state if the knowledge gained in SE has encouraged them to caution others on unsafe sexual practices. From the responses in table 20 above, 76% of the respondents feel that learning the aspects of SE has not encouraged them to caution others on unsafe sexual practices, 19% say that they are able to apply the knowledge to caution others to stay safe while 5% were undecided. It is concluded that, learning the aspects has not encouraged students to stay safe or to caution others on unsafe practices. This indicates that the aspects of SE in the C.R.E curriculum have not positively influenced students to stay safe and to caution others on unsafe sexual practices. Hence, the aspects have not met the objective of changing self and others behavior as stated in the syllabus objectives.

Based on such findings, one is also bound to think that the knowledge gained in exposing students to aspects of SE in the C.R.E curriculum could partly be the reason why some students are immoral in secondary schools. Student's opinions were therefore sought on whether aspects of SE taught in the C.R.E curriculum encourages immorality among youth in secondary school or not. From table 20 above, only 12.5% of the respondents say that SE catalyzes youth to become immoral, 9% were undecided while 78.5% disagree that SE promotes immorality among the youth. The results based on the perceptions of the respondents show that the aspects of SE taught in C.R.E do not increase immorality among students. This is contrary to the misconception that sexuality education encourages sexual activities.

The findings compare fairly well with three (3) studies on the impact of SE on number of sexual partners which found a significant decrease in the sexual partners (Grunseit et al (1997)). More so, of the 68 studies on SE in a scientific review, 65 found no associated increases in sexual behavior while of the 53 studies that evaluated specific interventions, 21 found that young people taking part in such programs had higher levels of abstinence, late start of sexual activity, higher use of contraceptives, fewer sexual partners and/or reduced rates of STDs and unplanned pregnancy. Once more, this is strong evidence that SE programs do not increase the number of sexual partners, does not increase sexual activity and can in fact lead to postponement of sexual activity once it begins. In addition, it is evident that these programs teach so much more than sex and the plan of SE includes many aspects of life not only sexual intercourse.

The perceptions of respondents on the way forward in improving the teaching of the existing aspects of SE were further sought. Respondents were to state whether the aspects of SE taught could be improved on. Responses in table 3 above indicate that majority of respondents believe that aspects of SE in the curriculum can be improved on with 84% of the sample population saying it can be done while 10.5% refuted the opinion and another 5.5% were un decided. Through focus group discussions, respondents gave varied views on what can be done to better SE. The views included making the teaching of SE more activity oriented to make it appealing to learners and to divorce it from the normal examination curriculum and teach it as a life skill subject. Others were of the opinion that the role of SE be stressed to the learners and the content to be comprehensive enough to meet their sexual challenges in life. Respondents also felt that the Ministry of Education should allocate more time to learn the aspects this should possibly start early, in fact right from form one and be made compulsory among all secondary school students. Another suggestion was that teachers be adequately trained to handle the area of SE with competence.

In conclusion therefore, the responses indicate that students in the sample population are positive that SE can be improved on and strengthened to make it adequate and effective to address their moral problems. Respondents also have various suggestions on how to improve the existing curriculum. This is possible if the participant's voice can be listened to in the process of the restructuring and implementation of SE in schools.

4. The role of religion in imparting SE

In this section, the role of religion in SE is highlighted with an underlying belief that SE without religious values is counterproductive. This in mind, the role of learning SE in a religious context (C.R.E) is evaluated alongside its influence on the perceptions of the respondents to aspects of SE in the curriculum. On whether it is important to learn SE in a religious education context responses indicate that 80.5% of the sample population perceive the learning of the aspects in a religious

context as important while 17.5% disagree that it is not necessary to study SE in a religious context and 2.0% were undecided. These responses indicate that majority of the respondents are positive with learning SE in C.R.E.

When probed to explain their stand, it was revealed that most respondents being from Christian backgrounds, strongly believe that they needed to learn SE in a religious context in line with the Christian teachings and values. Indeed, young people need SE but it must be placed in a moral context. This view point suggests that SE must be related to moral values and principles. There is need also for the teaching of SE to be strengthened to reach every youth in secondary school. If all the students in secondary school are the target of SE, it is hoped that this will help to address the problem of sexual immorality among youth in schools.

This study concurs with Kirby (2001) who asserts that we cannot teach sexuality and expect sexual purity without also teaching moral principles. For him, the greatest problem among youth today is not lack of education about sex, but a lack of moral instruction about sex. In order for SE to have immediate relevance to the behavior of the youth therefore, there is need to strongly re-assert the role of moralists and theologians in the teaching of SE by instructing youth about God's view of sex. Youth must be taught to avoid temptation by making no provision for the flesh bearing in mind that sex is sacred.

Students were further asked to state whether their religious values and beliefs of their respective churches have any influence on the way they perceive the aspects of SE in the C.R.E curriculum. Majority of the respondents (71.5%) believe that their religious faith (Christianity) greatly influences their perceptions to aspects of SE in the C.R.E curriculum. 23.5% are of the opinion that religion does not influence their perceptions to aspects of SE in the curriculum while 5.0% were undecided. These findings reveal that religion has great influence on the way students perceive the aspects of SE in the curriculum. Kamaara (2005) notes that unlike in some developing countries where religion has little impact on people's lives; in Africa, Christianity has a strong influence on the moral life of the majority of its believers. This shows that religion is a significant source of information. It also indicates the central role that the Church plays in guiding and molding the youth in matters of sexuality.

Respondents indicated that some churches discourage them against learning SE in school and this could partly be the reason for the negative attitude among students on the aspects of SE in the C.R.E curriculum. There is need for the church together with the other stake holders in education, to advocate and promote the teaching of SE in secondary schools.

1.4.1 Sexual Spiritualism

The role of religion in imparting SE can also be explained through the sexual spiritualism theory which provides a relationship between human spirituality and sexuality. It sees sexual activity as having a religious function which distinguishes human beings from animals. The theory postulates that human sexual behavior is significantly affected by one's spirituality. This theory is important in understanding that human beings are not just biological and social beings but also spiritual, made in the image and likeness of God. Kamaara (2005) notes that when male and female are joined together through sex, they complete one another in a completion that is not only biological but also spiritual and it reaches deep into the human soul.

It is on the basis of this theory that the study stresses the need for the youth to make choices and exercise self-control in sexual matters through the knowledge gained in SE. This knowledge should, however, not be de-linked from spirituality because in trying to separate sexuality and spirituality, sex ceases to be holy and when abused, it results into human suffering. Mbiti (1969) concurs in viewing sexuality as affecting the physical, biological, psychological, emotional and spiritual growth of every individual and that it is good, blessed, mysterious and sacred such that if misused, evil results.

SE should therefore equip the youth with biblical principles and moral leadership in the area of sexuality. It should affirm that sexuality is a divinely bestowed blessing for expressing love and generating life and is also capable of misuse leading to exploitation, abuse and suffering. If views as postulated in the sexual spiritualism theory are incorporated in the implementation of SE, youth will be exposed to a comprehensive and authentic SE that encompasses the physical, biological, mental and spiritual development to enable youth acquire and develop positive attitudes and skills to sexuality while at the same time giving it value. This is likely to bring about the desired moral behavior among youth in secondary schools.

It is with this realization that social groups and individuals should support the need for a well structured and comprehensive SE in the secondary school curriculum that is adequate for youth moral guidance in order to bring about positive impact on youth sexual behavior.

5. Conclusion

This paper presents the perceptions of respondents on aspects of SE taught in the C.R.E curriculum with knowledge and adequacy forming the basic parameters of measuring the student's perceptions. It is concluded that there is a positive perception among respondents on the parameter of knowledge. Respondents positively perceive themselves as having gained knowledge from learning the aspects of SE. The study also established that almost all youth in the sample perceive pre-marital sex as morally wrong but a majority of them are not opposed to the idea of having sex as they either always approve or sometimes approve pre-marital sex. Respondents are aware of the consequences of pre-marital sex and the precautions against the resultant risks.

It is, however, established that respondents have various misconceptions on issues of reproductive health and HIV infection. It is concluded that it is out of such misconceptions that youth end up with unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. The misconceptions held by respondents show that the aspects of SE taught in C.R.E have not provided accurate and factual information to students on matters of sexuality. The study further establishes mixed perceptions on the parameter of adequacy. Most respondents perceive the aspects of SE learned negatively as inadequate for their moral guidance. The aspects are perceived as having limitations in the manner of implementation, the methodology of teaching and even in the providers (teachers) of the content. This may explain why the aspects have not impacted positively on the student's moral behavior. It is established that respondents have not fully conceptualized the aspects of SE taught because the aspects do not touch on their emotions and real life situations and they are taught for the sake of taking the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (K.C.S.E) and not for their moral guidance. This therefore shows that the aspects are not comprehensive and explicit.

Lastly, the paper evaluates the influence of religion on the perceptions of the students on aspects of SE. Students perceive the learning of SE in C.R.E as important. They believe that they need to learn

SE in a religious context in line with their Christian teachings and values. This suggests that SE must be related to moral values. It is also established that because some churches are reluctant about the teaching of SE in schools, they discourage students against being taught SE in schools. This has impacted negatively on the perceptions of the students on the aspects of SE taught in the C.R.E curriculum.

References

Connelly, F. M. and Clandinin, D. J. (1990) "Stories of experience and narrative inquiry." *Educational Research*, 2-14.

Francoeur, R, and Noonan, J. (2005) "Demographics and a brief historical perspective" in *The international Encyclopedia of Sexuality*. 5-35.

Grunseit, A., et al. "Sexuality education and Young peoples Sexual behavior : A review of studies." (1997) *Journal of School of Health*, vol. 70, NO.8, 338-377.

Kamaara, E. K. (2005) *Gender, Youth Sexuality and HIV/AIDS :A Kenyan Experience*. Amecea Gaba publishers, Eldoret.

Kavivya, C.M. (2003) "The policy of the Catholic Church on Family Planning and Infertility Behavior in Kangundo Division, Machakos District." (Unpublished, PH.D Thesis, Kenyatta University.

Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS). (2005) National Council for Population and Development, Central Bureau of Statistics, Office of the Vice-President, Ministry of Planning and National Development.

Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS). (1989) National Council for Population and Development & Ministry of Home Affairs and National Heritage.

Kirby, D. *et al.*(1994), "School-based programmes to decrease sexual risk behaviors: a review of effectiveness",Public Health Report 109.

Mbiti, J. S. (1969) *African Religions and Philosophy*, London and Nairobi: Heinemann.

Mugisha, F, and Zulu, E.M. (2004) "The influence of Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Abuse on Sexual Relationships and Perception of Risk to HIV infection. *In journal of Youth Studies*, 279.

Nganda, S. (2004) "Sex Education: Do our teens need it?" Seminar Paper, Kenyatta University.

Ntozi, P.M., and Kirunga, C.J., (1998) "Family Planning and HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges and Strategies." *In African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 47.

Perschke, K. H. (1985). *Christian Ethics*, Alceister: C. Goodliffe Neale Ltd.