THE ROLE OF INDIGINOUS LANGUAGES IN REDUCING THE SPREAD OF HIV AND AIDS, A CASE STUDY OF GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the role of indigenous languages in combating the spread of HIV/AIDS, focusing on Gombe State, Nigeria. Despite widespread efforts to educate the public about HIV/AIDS, language and communication barriers persist, hindering effective dissemination of preventive measures. Utilizing a descriptive study design, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were employed to gather qualitative data from community members, healthcare providers, and local leaders. Statistical analysis revealed significant associations between demographic variables and awareness levels. Findings indicate that while participants demonstrated awareness of HIV/AIDS symptoms and prevention methods, gaps exist in understanding transmission routes, particularly oral transmission. Media, particularly local and international outlets broadcasting in indigenous languages, emerged as primary sources of information. The study highlights the importance of leveraging local languages in health communication to enhance awareness and preventive behaviors. Recommendations include expanding media campaigns in indigenous languages to curb HIV/AIDS transmission within Gombe State.

KEYWORDS: *Indigenous languages, HIV/AIDS, communication, prevention, Gombe State, Nigeria.*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to be a major public health issue with serious repercussions for impacted areas. Nigeria, one of the most populous nations on the continent, struggles with a high rate of HIV infections. Sub-Saharan Africa has been disproportionately affected. Utilizing the strength of indigenous languages is a distinctive and much underappreciated strategy among the many ones being used to stop the spread of HIV and AIDS. Indigenous languages play a unique role in the social, cultural, and communicational fabric of communities, and there is growing interest in their potential contribution to HIV/AIDS awareness, education, and prevention.

Gombe State stands out with remarkable linguistic diversity and rich cultural past that serve as the perfect backdrop for investigating how locally rooted indigenous languages can be used to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. Understanding the impact of indigenous languages in information dissemination, community participation, and behavioral change is an important area to investigate because HIV/AIDS continues to be a complex interaction of medical, social, and cultural issues.

In order to reduce the risks posed by health outbreaks, such as HIV/AIDS, public health authorities, such as the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), have been utilizing risk communication strategies. These strategies involve disseminating scientifically-based health messages through various communication channels to specific target audiences. The CDC has taken the lead in the battle against HIV/AIDS by developing public awareness campaigns that seek to inform and increase understanding of the significance of adopting HIV/AIDS preventive measures through straightforward yet powerful health messages to safeguard the public. The health messages also encourage people to adopt preventative health behaviours, such as avoiding the use of unsterilized needles and wearing condoms during sexual activities. In an effort to change their behaviour, to maintain public safety, such preventive health interventions must be implemented in both rural and urban settings that are open to the public.

At the heart of this study lies understanding how the linguistic diversity and cultural richness of Gombe State can be harnessed effectively to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. Specifically, this research aims to address the critical question of whether indigenous languages can serve as a potent tool in reducing the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and whether the strategies employed can serve as a model for similar regions facing comparable health challenges.

Although, massive campaign was done to enlighten the public about the HIV/AIDS virus in Gombe State, its dangers (weakened immune system) and preventive methods. Many of the local people of Gombe State are not aware of these preventive measures due to language and/or communication barriers.

2. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This is a descriptive study that took place in Gombe State, Nigeria using semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions and gather qualitative data from community members, healthcare providers, and local leaders. A questionnaire is designed to collect data from the respondents. Ten questions were designed and administered to each respondent after informed consent. After counting and coding, the questionnaires were numbered and archived. The collected data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.

2.1 Area of the Study
The study will be conducted within Gombe State, located in north-eastern Nigeria, it shares boundary with five states, namely, Yobe State to the North, Bauchi State to the West, Borno State to the East, Taraba, and Adamawa to the South.

2.2 Sample and Sampling Techniques
The study was conducted using probability sampling techniques, in which three local governments were selected from each senatorial zone, making a total of nine local governments out of the eleven in the study areas. In each local government, 100 interviewees were selected randomly.

2.3 Method of Data Collection
Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to gather qualitative data from community members, healthcare providers, and local leaders was conducted with the native languages speakers, preferably Fulfulde, Hausa, Tangale, Tera, and Waja, to capture rich narratives and experiences and a questionnaire was designed based on currently available information about HIV/AIDS, according to the literature. The questionnaire consist of four major sections. The first section measured socio-demographic variables including gender, age, educational level, employment status and local government of residence. The second section included items that are designed to measure respondents' awareness of the following: HIV/AIDS symptoms, transmission routes, precautionary measurements, and possible treatment options. Participants responded to each statement with either "yes" or "no." A scoring system was applied, with each correct answer given one point while incorrect answers receive zero points. The rest of the questionnaire sections involved items that evaluated participants' beliefs and emotions towards HIV/AIDS.

2.4 Method of Data Analysis
The collected data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. A confidence interval (CI) of >95% was adopted. Descriptive statistics was used to report the results, including means, frequencies, and standard deviations (SD). Statistical differences between the various awareness subscales and gender were determined by a 2-tailed Student's t-test. Significant associations between various socio-demographic variables and awareness subscales was evaluated using a one-way ANOVA. A p-value of 0.05 is considered significant.

3. RESULT

The study enlisted 450 individuals of which 133 (29.55%) were male, and 317 (70.45%) were female. The largest portion of participants were derived within the 18-30 age bracket, while the fewest came from the 35 to 50 age range. Females made up the majority of participants. Additionally, over half of the participants had completed only secondary education.

Table 1

Variables	Total %	Total awareness score			P (value)
		Inadequate n%	Average n%	Adequate n%	
Gender					<0.05
Male	133(29.55)	45(34.2)	55(40.7)	33(25.1)	
Female	317(70.45)	100(31.5)	130(41.5)	86(27.0)	
Age group					<0.05
<18	68(15.4)	16(23.4)	37(54.2)	15(22.4)	
18-34	119(26.5)	41(35.1)	37(30.7)	41(34.2)	
35-50	176(39.3)	39(22.2)	71(40.5)	66(37.3)	
50-60	87(19.1)	30(35.1)	42(47.8)	15(17.1)	
Education					<0.05
Degree	110(24.4)	25(31.5)	34(31.4)	41(37.1)	
Secondary level	255(56.8)	118(46.4)	76(29.8)	61(23.8)	
Primary level	56(12.5)	32(57.5)	14(25.0)	10(17.5)	
Uneducated	29(6.4)	22(75.0)	4(15)	3(10.0)	

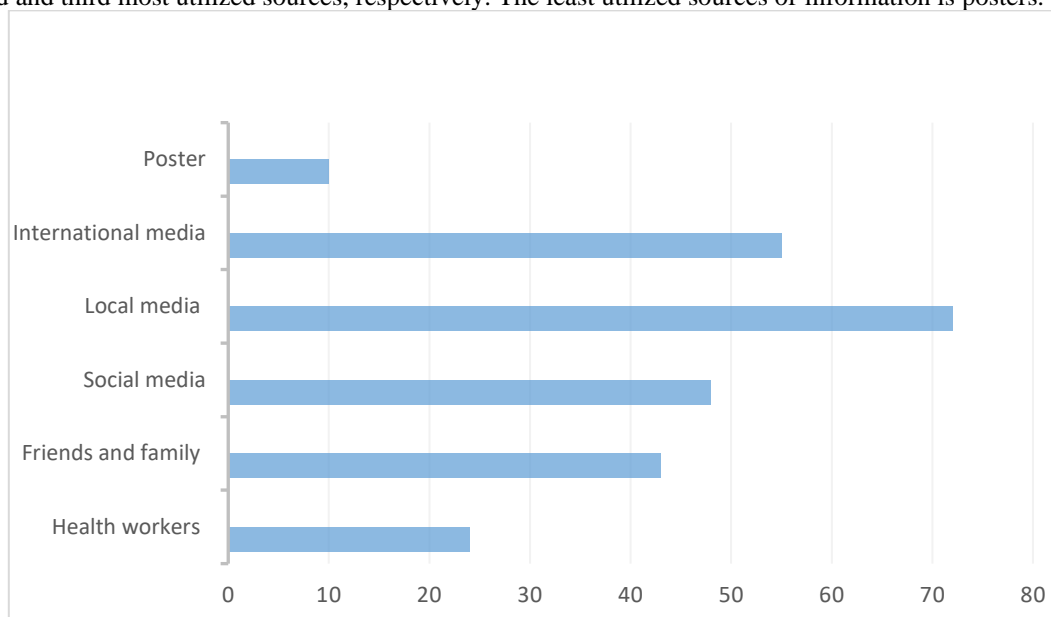# EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)

Table 2 presents participants' responses to various questionnaire items concerning the transmission, prevention, and symptoms of HIV/AIDS. The majority of participants demonstrated awareness of HIV/AIDS symptoms, while most were knowledgeable about condom use and avoiding unsterilized needles as preventive measures. On average, more than half of the participants showed a moderate level of awareness regarding HIV/AIDS symptoms, prevention, and transmission.

Table 2

Variable	Statement	n (%)
Symptoms	Fever and body weakness	393(87.5)
	Chills/ Rash	380(85)
	Swollen lymph nodes	251(55.8)
	Fatigue	234(52.0)
	Night sweats	410(91.2)
Transmission route	Mouth	57(12.6)
	Anus/penis/vagina	407(90.5)
	Broken skin	162(36.0)
	Pregnant women	277(61.6)
Preventive techniques	Use latex condoms (rubbers) for sex	382(84.9)
	Use water-based lubricants lotion	69(15.3)
	Never share needles to take drugs.	369(82.0)
	Avoid getting drunk	70(15.6)
	Get tested and treated for other STIs	330(73.5)
Treatments options using medication	Nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs)	108(24.0)
	Non- Nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs)	409(91.0)
	Protease inhibitors (NNRTIs)	213(47.5)
	Fushion inhibitors	247(54.9)
	Pharmacokinetic enhancers	320(71.0)

Figure 1 illustrates the sources of awareness among participants. The most commonly utilized sources of information on HIV/AIDS were local and international media outlets broadcasting in local languages. Social media and information from family and friends were the second and third most utilized sources, respectively. The least utilized sources of information is posters.

4. DISCUSSION
Nigeria possesses a diverse array of multilingual societies, spanning from the far northeast to the south-south regions. These native languages are deeply rooted within their respective communities, serving as the bedrock of cultural identity, encompassing norms,

values, folklore, idioms, and more (Asekere and Asaolu, 2020). The significance of indigenous languages in communication delivery and campaigns during such crises are widely recognized by scholars such as Igboanusi, Odoje, and Ibrahim (2016), Oyesomi et al. (2020), and Ogunyombo and Bello (2020).

Gombe State, situated in north-eastern Nigeria, historically had Fulfulde as the dominant linguistic and cultural influence until the mid-20th century. However, in recent decades, Hausa has emerged as the predominant lingua franca across northern Nigeria, including Gombe State. Despite this, numerous minority languages remain actively spoken. Among them are Fulfulde, Hausa, Tangale, Tera, and Waja, each boasting sizable communities of native speakers. Consequently, Gombe State is characterized as a multilingual state.

The research findings indicate that local and international media serve as primary sources of information for individuals seeking knowledge about HIV/AIDS. This underscores the crucial role of media communication in disseminating accurate and reliable information about the virus. Studies have shown that respondents from European countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy, as well as Australian citizens, rely on traditional media (such as television and news outlets) for their primary information about HIV/AIDS. Unsurprisingly, social media emerges as an important information source due to its easy accessibility and widespread usage, particularly in developing nations. This trend may be attributed to the dissemination of official governmental reports about the virus through traditional media channels using indigenous languages in Gombe State.

Participants' responses regarding symptoms, transmission, and prevention of HIV/AIDS reflect their actual knowledge and awareness levels. They demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of HIV/AIDS symptoms, which closely resemble those of fever, body weakness, chills, rash, and swollen lymph nodes, among others. However, only a small percentage of respondents were aware that HIV/AIDS can be transmitted orally, despite sexual transmission being well-established as its primary route (Rothan and Byrreddy, 2020). Those who do not believe in the transmission of the virus are more likely to underestimate the importance of the preventive measures recommended by the World Health Organization (Sallam et al., 2020). These individuals are often isolated from the digital world, lacking access to both local and international media.

5. CONCLUSION
The study underscores the importance of using local languages as a preventive measure to mitigate the spread of HIV/AIDS. This approach has significantly enhanced the level of awareness about symptoms, transmission, prevention, and treatment among the studied population. Encouraging more media campaigns in local languages is recommended as a means of curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS within Gombe State.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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