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Potential of Posters as Visual Pictorial Aids in the Process of Health and Nutrition Counselling in Cameroon

STEPHANIE HOY, HERMANN BOLAND

Justus-Liebig University Giessen, Institute of Rural Sociology and Extension, Germany

Abstract

A fundamental requirement within the international development cooperation is to communicate interculturally. Nevertheless projects aimed at nutrition counselling fail due to ambiguous communication. Therefore pictorial aids are suggested as a language-independent way of understanding. The aim of this study was to produce posters about nutrition related sicknesses affecting infants (0 to 36 months) in urban Cameroon. Their use and comprehensibility as a health counselling instrument should be measured. The study, conducted from May to August 2008, used a triangulation of methods related to qualitative social research. The methodology of the qualitative approach included participant observations and focus group discussions. Within the quantitative part, face-to-face interviews (n = 117 mothers) were conducted in order to gain the following information: the nutritional and health status of infants, the most common sicknesses in that age group, and the usage and comprehensibility of posters as counselling instruments. The results of the qualitative and quantitative data were transferred into visual pictorial aid by a local Cameroonian artist. Looking at the media use, the survey showed that verbal counselling by nurses was declared to be the most trustful source of information (64%). Furthermore 94% of the women have already used posters to get information about optimal child feeding practices, and 87% judged them to be easily or very easily comprehensible. As a result 97% wished to be counselled with the help of posters in future times. Consequently 10 posters about the resulting consequences of poor feeding practices and unhygienic feeding environments as well as their prevention were designed. For instance the storage of food under the bed and its contamination by insects, rodents, and other vermin; their resulting consequences such as stomach ache, diarrhoea, and worm infections; as well as their avoidance by covering the pot with a lid were visualised. The study showed that the implementation of pictorial embodiments is reasonable and could support verbal communication in order to facilitate intercultural communication and therefore increase the success of nutrition counselling programmes.

Keywords: Africa, Cameroon, counselling, intercultural communication, nutrition, posters, visual pictorial aids