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The Role of Home Economics in Higher Institutions in Nigeria

A. IGUNNU¹ and C.T. GBADEBO²

¹Department of Primary Education Studies, School of Education, Federal College of Education,
Zaria, Kaduna State

Phone: 08037206217

² Department of Home Economics and Food Science, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ilorin,
Kwara State, Nigeria

e-mail:christy24ng@yahoo.com Phone:08059165943 / 08065982341

ABSTRACT

Home Economics Education is expected to revive the family life, help foster family solidarity, enable family members cope with the changing demands of different stages of family life and ensure wholesome relationships among family members. This review explores the role of Home Economics education in higher institutions in Nigeria. It discusses concept of Home Economics, history of Home Economics. It states the objectives of Home Economics and focuses on the role of Home Economics in higher institutions. It highlighted Home Economics areas of focus / contents and challenges facing Home Economics courses were reviewed. The researcher is of the opinion that infusing Home Economics in higher institutions will contribute to global stability, economic, political, social development, and in fact, the world order as all these depends to a large extent on how the smallest units of individual families are morally equipped with the wherewithal to deal with challenges in an effort to make the world a better place to live in. The following recommendations were made among others. In-service education should be an integral part of the continuing efforts of government and other agencies concerned with education to promote and enhance role of Home Economics teacher's effectiveness and there should be awareness creation on the importance of Home Economics in higher institutions of learning. This review may be beneficial to policy makers and educators in their search of strategies for improving Home Economics as a course in higher institutions.

Keywords: Home Economics, Higher Institutions, Family Members

INTRODUCTION

The effect of modernization caused by industrialization, education, exposure and enculturation (Gradual acceptance of another culture) through importation of various foreign cultures, has transformed student's behaviour in Nigerian higher institutions from what it used to be in the past. The International Federation of Home Economics (IFHE, 2008) defines home economics as: a field of study and a profession, situated in the human sciences

that draws from a range of disciplines to achieve optimal and sustainable living for individuals, families and communities.

Pandey (2011) observed that Home Economics professionals believed that societal problems such as substance abuse, domestic violence, unemployment, divorce, obesity, nutritional diseases and child abuse can be more effectively addressed from a perspective that considers the individual and family as part of larger systems. As a school subject in different contexts and in different grades, home economics may be oriented as an applied academic subject, as a product- or technology-producing course, as career education, as independent-living skills, as health education, as parenting, or as family life education. As students stand at the threshold of adulthood, they need authentic knowledge that can help them understand the process of growing up with particular reference to their reproductive & nutritional health needs, so that they are well equipped to cope with the problems which they confront during the transitional phase.

Amodu (2005) stated that Home Economics provides the individuals with basic strategies to overcome poverty, to help secure foods & nutrition, health & hygiene, to handle household budget and available resources; to manage time, cope with market, train to be a better shopper, have good consumer behavior, to care for elderly, the sick and others, and to be able to combine professional and family responsibilities. The components of and the various factors that affect health and well-being and knowledge about various illnesses and diseases related to food and nutrition taught in Home Economics helps higher institution students to be knowledgeable about current research and new technologies in nutrition and food thereby promoting the family, society and Nations' wellbeing.

Emenike (1981) is of the opinion that the post-secondary school age which ranges between sixteen to twentyfive years of age is not only the most impressionable but the most inquisitive and decision making period of one's life time. They therefore need guidance and independent education as well as opportunities to explore life for themselves in order to attain a level of maturity required to make responsible decisions. This change can be initiated by promoting science as the basis for action, education as a platform to liberate them, and the home as a place to raise the standard of living and enact social change (Stage & Vincent, 1997). Thus, Home Economics education at this level becomes even more necessary and important to prevent inadequate or ill-informed idea/information on the depths and purposes of the family life. It is against this background that this paper discusses the Role of Home Economics in higher institutions in Nigeria.

Objectives of the review

The paper intends to cover the following areas

- I: To examine the concept of Home Economics;
- II: Ascertain the objectives of Home Economics;
- III: Explores the role of Home Economics in higher institutions in Nigeria;
- IV: Determine the area of focus/content area of Home Economics;
- V: Identify the challenges facing Home Economics.

Concept of Home Economics

Home economics in its most comprehensive sense is the study of the laws, conditions, principles, and ideals which are concerned on the one hand with man's immediate physical environment and on the other with his nature as a social being, and is the study of the relation between these two factors.

Currently, the International Federation of Home Economics (IFHE) defines home economics as: a field of study and a profession, situated in the human sciences that draws from a range of disciplines to achieve optimal and sustainable living for individuals, families and communities. As a curriculum area, home economics facilitates students to discover and further develop their own resources and capabilities to be used in their personal life (IFHE, 2008).

As a school subject in different contexts and in different grades, home economics may be oriented as an applied academic subject, as a product- or technology-producing course, as career education, as independent-living skills, as health education, as parenting, or as family life education. Home economics has at times suffered characterization as sewing and cooking, but today's home economists have turned their attention from caring for the family to tackling community issues such as poverty, obesity, and food safety (Dube, 2009). The emphasis has changed from a technical, skill-development, scientific approach to one that includes critical thinking and social responsibility.

The mission of home economics: is to enable families, both as individual units and generally as a social institution, to build and maintain systems of action which lead to (1) maturing in individual self-formation and (2) to enlightened, cooperative participation in the critique and formulation of social goals and means for accomplishing them. (Brown and Paolucci, 1979).

Home Economics deals with the family. It is concerned with people in contemporary society, managing human and material resources for the benefit of individuals and families.

From this perspective, Home Economics works through family to affect an optimum balance between people and their environments. The weight that home economics lay upon the family is the main factor for this research, as the author wanted to know the depth of home economics education as it is passed on to the students, who incidentally, are the future homemakers.

History of Home Economics

Early Pioneers: Home economics began in the late 1800s as a response to world-wide change and development. The rural way of life that had sustained untold generations with food, clothing, and shelter was gradually giving way to industrialization, resulting in migration to cities and large-scale emigration abroad. The social issues of family life, health, hygiene, and the rights of women and children became critically important.

The history of the profession reveals many examples of home economics professionals providing substantive and creative approaches to solving problems. Flora Rose served as the director of the College of Home Economics at Cornell. She was instrumental in the provision of nutrition education by Cooperative Extension Service specialists to help families meet their nutrition needs on relief allotments during the Great Depression. Lucy Maltby also responded to the issue of scarce resources by creating recipes based on postwar ingredient availability. (Stage & Vincenti, 1997).

Home Economics has endured multiple evolutions, definitions and criteria since its origins in contemporary family science between 1881 and 1920. Currently, Home Economics has tightened the reigns of its purpose, created fundamental criteria and yet still leads itself to an assortment of interpretations. The practice of Home Economics in the nineteenth century as an organization for social reform and as a career path for women in the early work of pioneers like Ellen Richards, (founder of home economics) who hosted the first Lake Placid, New York Conference in 1899. The attendees at the first conference dealt with strategies to improve daily life for families in their homes. (Stage & Vincent, 1997). Other inspiring leaders in this area were Catherine Beecher and Ellen Richards who promoted a science-based curriculum to prepare women for professional employment as well as for management of their homes at the Hartford Female Seminary others were Marion Talbot, Caroline Hunt, Flora Rose, Lucy Maltby, Mary Engle Pennington, Dora Boston and Marion Paul. Their collective mission was to initiate social change to improve living conditions for individuals, families, and communities. (Stage & Vincenti, 1997).

World War I began in 1914, removing men from families and the workplace. This created an immediate need for women to receive training and opportunity for work outside the home as well as the need for childcare. The social work and the public administration professions expanded in response to growing social needs of safe housing, equitable pay, and child advocacy.

Objectives of Home Economics

Home Economics Education is geared towards equipping individuals with saleable skills that will make them self-reliant: It exposes individuals to many occupational areas of skills in craft work, clothing, manufacturing, tailoring, fashion designing, baking, laundering, hotel management, street food vending, nursery school management and so on. Since Home Economics is related to multifarious disciplines such as Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Health, Social Sciences, Agriculture e.t.c. It will help higher institution students acquire sound knowledge and skills for making them self-reliant and have a long life as supported by Akuniyili (2004) that efficient knowledge acquisition are keys to longevity and quality of life. Anyakoha (2006) stated the following as the objectives of Home Economics:

- It teaches people how to live a good, healthy, & happy life in the Family, Community, Nation & the World.
- It prepares males & females for Home making and jobs that requires Home Economics knowledge and skills such as dieticians, nutritionist, caterers, food technologists, food and snack business.
- It helps to improve the well being of people in relation to the economic, social, cultural and physical environment.
- It assists people to discover and use potentials for upliftment for saleable skills and income generation.
- It empower students in the entrepreneurial skills in order to become interested in setting up their own business, thus building up the nation's human resources.
- It help students develop and express their talents and abilities, reap reward of their labour, and be their own boss and be acknowledged for their achievements.
- It teaches people how to use family resources to achieve the family goals.
- It equip people with the knowledge of interior decorating of homes, hotels, venues for party.

- It equips one with the knowledge of accident prevention, first aid, environmental sanitation.
- It serves as a vehicle to improve the quality of life for individuals, families, society and sustain a healthy environment and economic boost for the nation.

Dewhurst and Pendergast (2008) explains that studies in Home Economics aim to develop in students: -Reasoning processes that are fundamental to critical and participation in a range of life roles related to food, textiles and living environments

- Skills and understandings to take informed, practical action that promotes the wellbeing of individuals and families in the contexts of food, textiles and living environments
- Commitment to active, informed and collaborative participation to promote the wellbeing of individuals and families in the context of a socially just and ecologically sustainable environment.

The Role of Home Economics in higher institutions

With society rapidly changing and increasing in complexity at every level, it is important that young people receive specific training to help them meet with intelligence in accordance to the many facets of living with which they are faced. Whereas previously the home was chiefly a producing unit which demanded mainly the mastery of certain physical skills, today it is a consuming unit which demands the 'mastery of many and varied intellectual skills. The need for an emphasis on management and on the guidance of relationships has increased in direct proportion to this new need for intellectual skills. Amodu (2005) stated that Home Economics provides the individuals with basic strategies to overcome poverty, to help secure Foods & Nutrition, Health & hygiene, to handle household budget and available resources; to manage time, cope with market, train to be a better shopper, have good consumer behavior, to care for elderly, the sick and others, and to be able to combine professional and family responsibilities. Home Economics in higher institutions will contribute to global stability, economic, political, social development, and in fact, the world order as all these depends to a large extent on how the smallest units of individual families are morally equipped with the wherewithal to deal with challenges in an effort to make the world a better place to live in.

Home economics education is the only subject area that focuses on everyday life and meeting basic needs. In home economics, students learn practical and critical thinking skills that equip them to handle the increasing complexities of

daily life. Consider the following indicators of the need for home economics education for all students in Nigeria as enumerated by Smith and Leah (2010).

Increased concerns about healthy eating habits

According to the World Health Organization, the impact of obesity and overweight on non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, and cancer threatens to overwhelm healthcare systems. Projections indicate that the current generation of students might be the first who have shorter life expectancies than their parents (Belluck, 2005).

As a result, there have been many calls for nutrition education. However, focusing on nutrition knowledge transmission alone is not the answer. A literature review (Lang and Caraher, 2001) on the teaching of food and cooking skills determined that mastery of these skills is necessary for a full understanding of what constitutes a healthy life and to empower individuals to take control over their diet and food intake. Without practical, first-hand experience in preparing foods and learning about nutrition, choice and control are diminished and dependence on processed and fast food emerges.

Home Economics and Foods and Nutrition courses provide the only opportunity for students to learn about nutrition and healthy eating through the 'hands-on' food preparation that is recognized as more effective in changing behaviour than knowledge transmission.

The impact of poor parenting practices

Parenting is the most important job because it determines the character of our children and the quality of our society. Yet few people get any training for it. An alarming number of children are at risk of being abused, neglected or otherwise poorly cared for by inadequately prepared parents. Parenting practices have significant effects on a child's social and cognitive outcomes and on the likelihood that a child is vulnerable in some way. Parenting Education for student in higher institutions addresses these concerns in several ways by Home Economics, working to interrupt the cycle of poor parenting before young people become parents. Preparing youth to become caring, competent parents may be the single most effective way to prevent child abuse and other violence, increase mental health, advance school preparedness, and achieve academic success for future generations. Surely the care of children should be a central topic in the education of all students (Noddings, 1992). Home Economics Family Studies courses are the only provincial curriculum that offers parenting education.

The impact of financial illiteracy
Informed money management plays a vital role in raising the quality of life for individuals and families. Consumers are better positioned to make informed financial decisions that affect their livelihood when they understand the financial products and services, and options that are available to them. But competency in managing money appears to be a skill that doesn't come naturally to everyone. Unless a person is exposed to the practice of money management, he/she is less likely to understand how it works and its long-term benefits. It is easy to develop poor spending and financial habits, resulting in significant negative consequences such as a poor credit rating, denial of credit, rejection for a checking account, and personal bankruptcy, to name a few. While financial vocabulary is important, research in literacy education shows that students must have the opportunity to engage in "real or simulated" literacy events that over time become literacy practices (Cimbaro, 2008). Financial literacy must be more than simple recitation of facts.

Home Economics courses provide many opportunities for students to practice and gain competency in making financial decisions that apply to food, clothing, shelter and family living choices that people must make over the life-span. (Teacher Inquirer, 2010, www.bctf.ca)

The increasing complexity of family life

Most Nigerians now live in dual-income and single-parent families rather than the traditional male-breadwinner family. Workers who experience difficulties meeting family commitments often find it difficult to give their best at work, and have a higher rate of absenteeism and stress-related health issues. The strengthening of families is essential for a strong nation and national economy: loss of productivity due to family issues can lead to multi-billion-dollar losses.

Home economics is the only school subject that addresses work and family life balance.

Increased concern about global citizenship and environmental health

Environmental sustainability has increasingly become an international agenda as the basic necessities of life such as water, food, and safe living conditions cannot be taken for granted and the implication for the most vulnerable populations cannot be ignored. Consumers are often unaware of their own responsibility for making sustainable choices. While products are readily available from around the world, consumers need to be aware of the conditions

in which these products are produced, who is being affected, and the environmental impact. Developing a sense of environmental responsibility which goes against the consumerist culture and the tyranny of the short term is one of the family's most crucial tasks.

All home economics courses provide opportunities for students to develop a sense of global citizenship in the wise use of human and material resources.

Home economics makes a unique contribution to the education of young people in that it focuses on the nature and challenges of our daily lives in relationship to other peoples, social systems, and material resources.

(Suri Prakesh, 1995).

AREAS OF HOME ECONOMICS

The Home Economics curriculum centers on questions such as what should be done about maintaining health, securing housing, acquiring appropriate clothing, caring for children, ensuring food security, making ethical consumer decisions, and so on, it is unique in teaching about foods and nutrition, parenting, human relationships and development, resource management, consumerism, clothing and textiles, housing and aesthetics, and integrating these topics and decisions about daily life with the well-being and fair treatment of people and the environment.

Home economics maintains the educative and preventative mission of its early roots. It helps students to optimize living in their current familial and personal relationships and to plan well for their future relationships and families. It aspires to increase the resourcefulness of people and help them to live satisfying, sustainable and quality lives caring for themselves and others. Home economics provides students with the opportunity to consider daily living problems before hand, contributing to development of self-reliant attitudes and abilities and a sense of social responsibility. The skills and knowledge developed in home economics are useful to students not only in their personal and family lives, but also in securing and holding employment in business, industry, and the professions, and participating as active citizens in a democratic society.

The followings are areas of Home Economics as enumerated by California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (2010).

Nutrition, Foods, and Hospitality: Candidates demonstrate an understanding of food science, nutritional science, food and preparation, and hospitality. Candidates understand the scope of food and nutritional science, including

physiological and biochemical processes involved in the preparation and consumption of food and nutrients. They understand the components of and various factors that affect health and well-being and have knowledge about various illnesses and diseases related to food and nutrition. They are knowledgeable about current research and new technologies in nutrition and food industries. They also understand procedures and techniques related to food preparation and meal management. Candidates have knowledge of various kitchen designs, equipment, appliances, safety and sanitation standards, and emergency procedures. They are also familiar with knowledge and skills transferable to a variety of careers related to food, nutrition, and hospitality industries.

Food and Nutritional Science: Demonstrate knowledge of the principles of food and nutritional science, such as the chemical and physical reactions that occur in food; characteristics and functions of nutrients; the digestion, absorption, and metabolism of nutrients; and the factors that affect the nutritional value of foods and beverages.

Food Preparation and Hospitality: Demonstrate knowledge of the principles of food safety and sanitation, including food-borne illnesses, their causes, and prevention.

Fashion and Textiles: Candidates demonstrate an understanding of fashion, textiles, and apparel design and construction. Candidates must have a substantial understanding of the history of fashion and current trends in fashion; wardrobe management; fibers, fabrics, and finishes; and apparel equipment and materials, as well as maintenance and construction procedures used in various activities related to apparel and textile items. They are familiar with knowledge and skills transferable to a variety of careers related to the fashion and textile industries.

Personal, Family, and Child Development: Candidates demonstrate an understanding of personal, interpersonal, and family relationships; parenting; and child development and education. Candidates must have a broad and deep understanding of the types of relationships people have, as well as the factors that can affect relationships. They recognize major theories about human and family development and understand methods, strategies, and approaches that can be used to foster physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development.

They are also familiar with knowledge and skills transferable to a variety of careers related to family services, child development, and education.

Consumer Education & household management: Candidates demonstrate an understanding of personal and family resources, consumer rights and responsibilities, economic systems, and personal finances. Candidates must have a substantial understanding of consumer economics, decisions, purchases, and the resources and factors that inform, influence, and shape personal and family resource management. They understand how the economy functions and the factors that affect it, as well as its effects on consumers. They have an understanding of the global market and the global economy and how they affect the Nigerian economic system. They are also familiar with knowledge and skills transferable to a variety of careers related to the consumer service industry.

Housing and Interior Design: Candidates demonstrate an understanding of interior design and housing. Candidates must understand the elements and principles of design; historical and contemporary interiors, architectural styles, and furniture designs; and the materials, methods, tools, and technology used in design of living and working environments. They also understand consumer aspects of interiors and housing, such as the role of the government and other organizations in housing and related matters; the criteria considered in selecting housing; and the laws, regulations, and responsibilities associated with housing. They are familiar with knowledge and skills transferable to a variety of careers related to the interior design and housing industries.

Challenges of Home Economics

Home Economics has a rich history grounded in science, which should earn the respect of other science-based professions but they are often unaware of its contributions to science and to society. Home Economics in Nigeria has many prospects but also faces many challenges enumerated below.

- Information Technologies make it possible to provide family related information twenty-four hours a day, and help facilitate the preparation of professionals through online courses. (Hughes et al, 1999). The challenges these technologies poses to traditional Home Economics approaches is the reliability and validity of the information available and the effectiveness of this form information.

- The development and implementation of Home Economics need to be supported by social and educational policies and political decisions for it to achieve the goal of helping to improve family issues.
- Implementation may be difficult because of resistance from parents, political and religious leaders.
- Schools boards and community interest groups may place restrictions on the content taught in schools, thereby failing to meet some important needs of this age group.
- Inadequate financial support to pay registration fees may prevent some who need the program from getting it.
- The programme is also hampered by lack of time allocated to them, lack of educational resources, and limitation in preparing Home Economics teachers.
- low status- belief that home economics is a low status area of knowledge continues today. (Pendergast, 2001) One of the effects of this is that home economics tends to be dropped by more academic pupils when it comes to subject choice; (Blythman, 2006).
- Commitment to name. - With emphasis on industrial applications, a name change was justified to reflect this, in the hope of enhancing career opportunities for graduates, attracting research funding and increasing male recruitment. They claim that to rid itself of its historical shackles and encapsulate its radically changed content and lessening focus on the home, a name change is necessary (Dewhurst and Pendergast, 2008).
- Gender Bias -There is the misconception that Home Economics courses are only suitable for girls alone and should be taught by women thereby making the males to shy away from the course.

CONCLUSION

Home Economics is any effort to strengthen family life through education or support. The objective of all Home Economics is to enrich and improve the quality of individual and family life. Home Economics emphasizes processes that help people develop into healthy adults, work together in close relationships, and bring out the best in others. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of Nigerians especially higher institution students are ever reached by Home Economics knowledge. This is a painful reality since there is no enterprise that is

as complex as being a human. There may be no arena of life in which education may be as valuable as in Home Economics.

This review observed that the inclusion of Home Economics in the higher institution curriculum is highly desirable as it is one of the ways of improving the sanity of family life and improving the health and family relationships of members & controlling the population and spread of sexually-transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. In my opinion if Home Economics will bring back sanity, let it be introduced in all higher institutions but it should be handled by qualified and disciplined tutors while all the school staff must be involved in counselling. All staff must be given a role to perform since it entails broader scope. Home Economics is important in its contribution to strengthening families to fulfill their significant role as the basic units of the society, therefore effort and available resources should be mobilized to teach youths for a better and productive future life.

For the youth to become responsible future leaders, it becomes necessary to teach Home Economics, not only at the school level, but at the family level. This review, nevertheless, concludes by a suggestion for continued research in this area with the intent of developing some theoretical rigor that will facilitate the development of effective prevention programs in Home Economics in higher institutions. This study will create awareness among teachers, educators, curriculum planners, parents and students; and their representative organisations, administrators, staff, and school-based service workers about Home Economics and help them to plan, implement, and evaluate school-based efforts to improve family living, as part of the development of students to make them responsible members of the family, community and the nation. Finally, the study is expected to encourage social policy makers to make recommendations that will encourage students to learn and practice skills to protect themselves, make healthy choices and adopt socially responsible/healthy behaviours throughout their lives.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on this study.

- In-service education should be an integral part of the continuing efforts of government and other agencies concerned with education to promote and enhance Home Economics teacher's effectiveness.

- Periodically, conscious efforts should be made by departments of education at local, state and federal levels to mount seminars and workshops for information, update knowledge not only in the subject matter of Home Economics but also in innovative approaches in coping with problems usually associated with it.
- There should be more awareness creation on the importance of Home Economics education in higher institutions of learning through the governing bodies of the institutions, non- Governmental organizations, religious bodies, and youth organizations etc.
- We must also be forward thinking to anticipate future needs. Being active in professional organizations, communicating with Home Economics professionals in different geographic areas, and reading current research and professional literature are just a few ways to stay abreast of trends.
- Promote the value of current Home Economics courses at the higher institution level, to demonstrate how they address current social needs, in order to avoid the erosion of Home Economics courses when other courses are added on or given compulsory status (e.g., nutrition education, consumer education, parenting education).

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