

HOME ECONOMICS FOR EFFECTIVE CHILD GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper looks at Home Economics for effective child growth and development in educational institutions in Nigeria. The paper takes a broad look at what Home Economics is as well as child development. The paper sees Home Economics as a course that deals with the family, health, sanitation, textiles and clothing, home management, clothing and textiles, housing and furnishing, child development and family relationships. It views child development as a sequence of physical, language, thought and emotional changes that occur in a child from birth to the beginning of adulthood. It argues that the child, for any nation, must be given a prime of place in the nation's developmental plan. This is because children are vulnerable, even as they remain the future of any nation. As future leaders, they deserve full attention from the family to the larger society. The paper looks at the ways Home Economics contributes to the development of the child. It takes a look at the challenges of Home Economics in the growth and development of the child. Finally, the makes recommendations on how to Home Economics can enhance the growth and development of the child, among which are

Key words: Child Development Growth Home Economics

INTRODUCTION

In every culture or tradition, the wellbeing of a child is of utmost importance. A society is destroying itself when children are not well taken of. In fact, the future of any nation depends to a large extent on children. That is the more reason why children are often referred to as future of a nation or society. Therefore, children's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing must be taken seriously by all stakeholders.

Home Economics, dealing with the family and the society has a great deal to contribute to a child's growth and development. The growth and development of a child are necessary as this will eventually translate to impact upon the family. Maintaining healthy life style, good eating habit and beneficial family economics will impact greatly on a child's growth and development. This paper looks at Home Economics, child development and the challenges in using Home Economics for child development. The paper has offered some suggestions on ways of enhancing Home Economics for effective child development.

Home Economics

Home Economics is a field of study that is concerned with "strengthening family life and increasing productivity of individuals in the social economy," (Alabi & Keswet, 2015). Home Economics is a broad field of study which embraces "all phases of family and social life; a vast area of human learning which involves education and researches in many areas...food and nutrition, housing and furnishing, home management, clothing and textiles, child development and family relationships," (Ehumadu & Chinwe (n.d.). Ehumadu (2020) added that Home Economics is a "multi-faceted discipline which connotes inter-disciplinary,

multi-disciplinary, multi-dimensional and multi-cultural-cum-cross-cultural professions of life most of which have expanded vistas in their various distinct areas of ecological study." Home Economics "integrates various literacies: environmental literacy together with nutrition, health, and financial literacies (Hira, 2013). Home Economics is an area of study that is "primarily concerned with strengthening family life and increasing productivity of individuals in the social economy," (Bello & Bello, n.d.). The authors added that Home Economics "synthesis knowledge from arts and science based disciplines to improve manipulative skills, organizational skills and social skills." In essence, Home Economics has been linked to "preparing and serving food for family members and carrying out other types of tasks in connection with looking after the home," (Andreasen & Rasmussen, 2022).

Home Economics "includes priority areas such as food, eating habits, healthy lifestyle, textile and clothing, home, consumerism, and personal and family economics," (Kostanjevec & Kozina, 2021). Home Economics therefore, is a field of study that aims at promoting good health, sanitation and healthy and effective family life. Consequently, Nwagwu (2014) held that the mission of Home Economics education is to help people and families generally to improve their lives through training for necessary manpower in entrepreneurship, training and imparting of necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically, and provision of technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for national development of improved skills, capabilities, and utilization of workers employed in government and private sectors. Buttressing this, Bello and Bello (n.d.) opined that "the focal point of Home economics education is to equip young people and adults with sustainable skills, relevant knowledge and attitudes for work in chosen occupation and career opportunity."

The International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE, 2015) saw Home Economics as an area of study and as well a profession, domiciled in the human science which draws from a variety of disciplines aimed at achieving optimal and sustainable living for individuals, families, and communities. Consequently, topics normally covered in Home Economics, according to Ajibola (2019) are cooking, home management, nutrition, budgeting and economics, hygiene, food preservation, family relations, consumer education, interior design, health, child upbringing, community education awareness and home safety.

The aims of Home Economics, among others, are:

1. To build and develop the skills necessary for management of resources
2. To develop home management skills
3. To build organizational skills
4. To prepare for home and family living
5. To foster the process of becoming a dietitian
6. To create a positive attitude towards consumers' rights and responsibilities
7. To provide the needed experience for professional home economics job
8. To develop students' capability towards resolving home related problems
9. To learn the proper use of home equipment

(Ajibola, 2019).

Home Economics Components

The following are the various components of Home Economics as provided by Amah (n.d.):

1. Clothing and Textiles

- i. Fashion and designing
- ii. Craft work
- iii. Clothing maintenance
- iv. Laundry services
- v. Tie-dyeing and batiking
- vi. Textile and clothing merchandise.
2. Food and Nutrition
 - i. Catering and Hotel management
 - ii. Opening snacks centre or restaurant
 - iii. Baking
 - iv. Food processing and preservation
3. Child Development and Family Relations
 - i. Nursing school and Director
 - ii. Proprietors of private primary or Secondary schools
 - iii. Director of social/welfare centre
4. Home Management
 - i. Interior Decorations
 - ii. Day-care and Nursing management
 - iii. Managing of old peoples Home extension worker
 - iv. Vegetable and Flower Gathering
 - v. Institutional Home Keepers

Child Development

Why must a nation or society bother about the child? A nation or society needs to be bothered about the child because a child is "vulnerable to diseases caused by a lack of nutrition between the ages of 4 and 6 months, and immunization should be administered on a regular basis to prevent those diseases," (Parveen, Nazir & Bashir, 2023). In essence, children are at the centre of national economic and health planning. This is because, as Manas (2020) put it "today's children will become tomorrow's citizens, workers, and parents," adding that investing in children and the family will undoubtedly secure a nation's future. Consequently, for effective child development, the womenfolk are at the centre of activities. In light of this, the study by Alabi and Keswet (2015) found among others, that to achieve effective development and alleviate poverty in the family, the women folk should be educated on income generation, taught on ways to form formidable cooperative groups for establishment of small scale businesses, and encouraged to combine farming with other occupations. Besides, a study by Ehumadu and Chinwe (n.d.) found that Home Economics Education extension workers were taught house craft skills, proper use of contraceptives and techniques for proper management of limited resources in post covid-19 pandemic. In Denmark, for instance, "the development of home economics contributed to turning home duties into an educational and occupational area, preparing for a welfare state, making the private sphere a public matter. On the other hand, it tied women to the private sphere and prevented their influence in the public sphere," (Andreasen & Rasmussen, 2022).

Child development refers to the "sequence of physical, language, thought and emotional changes that occur in a child from birth to the beginning of adulthood (Kid Sense, 2023). Kid Sense posits that child development covers cognition, social interaction and emotional regulation, speech and language, physical skills and sensory awareness of the

child. All of that contribute to making the child what he ought to be up to adulthood. Home Economics plays a vital part in the growth and development of the child.

One fundamental thing a society or nation can provide the child is education in general and home economics in particular. Education can equip the child to be a responsible member of the micro and macro society. Home Economics will provide the child with vocational skills that can make the child work and earn a living both for himself and for others in adult life. Therefore, it behoves on a country or society to take the issue of education very seriously, especially child education.

Home Economics for Child Growth and Development

Home Economics plays a vital role in the growth and development of a child. The following are ways which Home Economics does achieve that:

1. Home Economics provides the child with vocational skills and knowledge whereby the child uses his hands to work and earn a living for himself and then become a responsible member of the society. Again, owing to the fact that "the problems of modern times and everyday challenges are far from simple, an individual should possess different types of knowledge and skills in order to solve them successfully," (Erjavšek, Kozina & Kostanjevec, 2021).
2. Home Economics develops in the child capabilities for resolving home related challenges.
3. The subject inculcates in the child home management skills. The child grows up with the idea that the home needs to be carefully looked after.
4. The subject teaches the child techniques of personal hygiene and how to keep the environment clean.
5. Home Economics prepares the child for home and family living. Perhaps the relationship that exists between father and mother will bear a great deal on how the child will view family life and how best to live it. Where parents have good and cordial relationship among themselves, their children will be able to live out the family life and be successful in later years.
6. It develops in the child the skills necessary for management of resources and home equipment.
7. Home Economics builds in the child organizational skills.
8. Home Economics aims at improving the standard of living of the child and the family both in the rural and urban areas by moving away from the traditional methods of crafting to modern ones. This point is buttressed by the International Federation of Home Economics Association (IFHEA) (2015) which stressed on the need to move away from the traditional methods of crafting and patterns of living to modern ones. This position is further buttressed by Ehumadu and Chinwe (n.d.) who held that it is important for rural dwellers to move away from the old methods of their family resource management practices to embrace the new and better ways of life.

Child growth and development is key to a nation's progress. Any society or nation that overlooks its children's well-being is doing itself at great disservice. This underscores the point raised by Manas (2020) that "children who come from the most vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds need good-quality services and care the most, including children with special needs for early childhood development." The author added that "To ensure a nation's children develop well, adequate investment in early childhood development is essential." Speaking on the importance of education to a nation, UNESCO

(2014) pointed out that "quality education is crucial for increasing the quality of life for individuals and for advancing sustainable development."

Challenges of Home Economics for Child Growth and Development

Over the years, Home Economics as a field of study has faced a lot of challenges. Due to poor performance of students in the course, parents have counselled their children away from offering the course (Rose, 2015). There are also teacher factors and classroom environment that have contributed to students' unwillingness to offer the course in school (Uwameiye, 2015, Nchekwube & Igwe, 2021). There is also the challenge related to gender. It is believed that Home Economics is related to the female gender and hence, suitable only for girls (Caraher & McCloat, 2016). Speaking on this, Nchekwube and Igwe (2021) held that "the observed gender bias poses a severe threat to the continuity of home economics in Nigeria's school system." The attitude of parents towards Home Economics is another challenge faced by Home Economics for effective child growth and development. Parents' negative attitude toward Home Economics can affect their children's interest in the subject. As has been pointed out, this is also linked to the fact that the subject is considered suitable only for girls. A study by Nchekwube and Igwe (2021) found that there was prevalence of negative attitude towards Home Economics in secondary schools in Nigeria. This negative attitude had the tendency to affect students' interest in the course. This could go a long way in affecting enrollment in the course.

A study by Paas and Palojoki (2018) which investigated the aims and challenges of handicraft and home economics education in Estonia found that the challenges encountered by Home Economics had to do with organizational, economic and social aspects, dealing with the mandatory divergent conditions and students' poor handicraft skills. The study also found that the importance of Home Economics was generally not seen in society. The study suggested the promotion of Home Economics as a subject and separating it from handicrafts. Other challenges relate to the availability of resources, cultural beliefs about Home Economics and the selection of content for the lessons. Studies have shown concern over the resources for teaching Home Economics (Lindblom, 2016), cultural beliefs embedded in the subject (Bohm, 2016), and about the selection of content for the lessons (Granberg, 2018; Lange, 2017). There are also concerns raised over the teacher's cooperation over the subject borders (Janhonen, 2016). Other challenges like shortage of qualified and competent teachers, lack of adequate funding, ineffective teaching methodologies, inadequate facilities, and lack of commitment to job, have been identified (Amah, n.d.).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Home Economics forms a fundamental course of study in educational institutions in Nigeria. It is very vital for effective family living. Home Economics is seen as a field of study that aims at promoting good health, sanitation and healthy and effective family life, placing emphasis on food, eating habits, healthy lifestyle, textile and clothing, the home, and personal and family economics. The course aims to develop knowledge in individuals in order for them to manage home and resources effectively. For a developing country like Nigeria, child care and development have become necessary. Home Economics can achieve in a number of ways, among which are developing in the child capabilities for resolving home related challenges, inculcating in the child home management skills, and teaching the child techniques of personal hygiene and how to keep the environment clean.

The paper has identified several challenges facing Home Economics for effective child growth and development. Some of the challenges are the negative attitude of parents towards the course which affects students' interest, poor learning environment, cultural beliefs, and teacher factors. The paper therefore, makes the following recommendations:

1. The child should be at the centre of things when planning for Home Economics courses.
2. Government needs to place a high premium on educating the child and on the family so as to have patriotic leaders in future.
3. Teachers of Home Economics need to be trained and retrained through in-service and conferences and workshops. This will assist greatly in enhancing their skills and knowledge.
4. Home Economics laboratories need to be well equipped in order for students to effectively conduct their practical work.
5. Government needs to increase funding for Home Economics so that teachers and students will be able to undertake their activities successfully.
6. Teachers and laboratory attendants need to be committed to duty so students can be adequately taught.
7. Parents need to develop positive attitude towards Home Economics and encourage their wards to develop interest in the course with a view to acquiring vital knowledge and skills that will make them self-reliant and enterprising.

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