

Interplay Between Home Economics and Nutritional Values and the Challenges of Increasing Life Expectancy in Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examines interplay between home economics and nutritional values and the challenges of increasing life expectancy in Nigeria. This study employed descriptive survey research design where questionnaire was used to acquire necessary data for the research work. Population comprises all universities students in Ogun State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select three universities and fifty (50) students were randomly selected from each university to make a total of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents in Ogun State as sample for study. Two (2) research questions were raised and answered in this study. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha and data collected were analyzed using simple percentage, mean and standard deviation statistical tools. Findings revealed that, home economics education equips individuals with essential knowledge and practical skills in nutrition, food preparation, and healthy lifestyle choices, which are fundamental in combating malnutrition and diet-related diseases. Through home economics, individuals learn to make informed dietary choices that prevent under nutrition and over nutrition, both of which are prevalent in Nigeria. Moreover, home economics education promotes food security by teaching efficient food utilization and sustainable agricultural practices, which are critical in a country where many regions face food insecurity due to socio-economic and environmental factors. By fostering better nutritional practices, home economics education can enhance maternal and child health, boost cognitive development, and improve overall health outcomes, thereby contributing to increased life expectancy. It is therefore recommended that, curriculum planners should modernize the home economics curriculum to include comprehensive, evidence-based information on nutrition, health, and sustainable living practices. They should ensure that the curriculum includes practical, hands-on experiences in cooking, meal planning, budgeting, and food preservation to better prepare students for real-life applications.

Keywords: *Interplay, Home economics, Nutritional values, Life expectancy*

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Background to the Study

Life expectancy is a crucial indicator of a nation's overall health and well-being. In Nigeria, despite significant advancements in healthcare, life expectancy remains relatively low compared to global standards. According to the World Bank (2021), the average life expectancy in Nigeria is approximately 55 years, significantly below the global average of 72. This discrepancy is partly attributed to poor nutritional practices, which contribute to a high prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases (WHO, 2018).

Home economics, also called domestic science or family and consumer sciences, is a subject concerning human development, personal and family finances, consumer issues, housing and interior design, nutrition and food preparation, as well as textiles and apparel. Home economics, originally known as domestic science, emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a response to the growing need for formal education in household management and family health. The field was pioneered by Ellen Swallow Richards, who is often regarded as the founder of home economics. Richards, a chemist and the first woman to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, recognized the importance of applying scientific principles to domestic life to improve health, efficiency, and overall quality of life (Stage & Vincenti, 2017).

In its early days, home economics focused on teaching women skills related to cooking, sewing, and child-rearing, which were considered essential for maintaining a healthy and efficient household. The curriculum was designed to empower women with knowledge that could improve their families' well-being and contribute to the broader societal good (Stage, 2017). Over time, the scope of home economics expanded to include a broader range of subjects, such as nutrition, financial management, consumer education, and family relationships, reflecting the evolving needs and roles of women in society.

Home economics education provides individuals with essential knowledge and skills to manage their households effectively, including preparing balanced diets, understanding nutritional needs, and making informed food choices (McGregor, 2016). In Nigeria, however, the implementation and reach of home economics programs are inconsistent, often limited by educational policies, resource allocation, and socio-cultural factors (Akinola & Ogunniyi, 2019). Despite these challenges, there is potential for home economics to significantly improve nutritional practices and health outcomes if integrated effectively into the education system.

Nutritional values, encompassing the essential nutrients required for growth, development, and maintaining health, are fundamental to preventing malnutrition and NCDs (FAO, 2014). Inadequate nutrition, characterized by either under nutrition or over nutrition, poses significant health risks. In Nigeria, under nutrition remains a major public health issue, particularly among children and women of reproductive age. The 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey reported that 37% of children under five are stunted, and 7% are wasted (NPC & ICF, 2019). Concurrently, urbanization and

lifestyle changes have led to increased consumption of processed foods high in fats, sugars, and salt, contributing to rising obesity rates and associated health problems (Popkin, Adair, & Ng, 2012).

The relationship between home economics education and nutritional values is evident in various studies that highlight the positive impact of such education on dietary habits and health outcomes. Several studies have explored the impact of home economics education on nutritional value, revealing its significant role in promoting healthy eating behaviours and improving nutritional knowledge. These studies span various geographical contexts and educational settings, demonstrating the widespread benefits of home economics education. One notable study by Kim and Ahn (2016) examined the impact of home economics education on high school students' dietary behaviours in Korea. The researchers found that students who participated in home economics classes had better nutritional knowledge and healthier eating habits compared to their peers who did not receive such education. Specifically, these students were more likely to consume balanced meals, including a higher intake of fruits and vegetables, and were less likely to consume fast food and sugary snacks. The study concluded that home economics education plays a crucial role in shaping positive dietary behaviours during adolescence, a critical period for establishing lifelong eating habits.

Similarly, a study conducted by Murphy et al. (2011) in rural Uganda evaluated the effects of integrating home economics into the school curriculum on children's nutritional status. The intervention involved teaching students about balanced diets, food preparation, and the nutritional value of local foods. The results showed a significant improvement in the children's dietary diversity and overall nutritional status, as evidenced by increased intake of protein, vitamins, and minerals. The study highlighted the potential of school-based home economics programs to address malnutrition and promote better health outcomes in resource-limited settings. In the United States, a study by Fiese et al. (2013) explored the long-term impact of home economics education on college students' nutritional behaviours. The researchers assessed students who had taken home economics courses in high school and compared their dietary habits to those who had not. The findings indicated that those with a background in home economics were more likely to make healthier food choices, such as opting for whole grains, lean proteins, and fresh produce. Additionally, these students demonstrated greater confidence in their cooking skills and food preparation, which contributed to their ability to maintain a nutritious diet. In Nigeria, Akinola and Ogunniyi (2019) investigated the effects of home economics education on household nutrition and food security. Their study focused on rural and urban households and assessed the knowledge and practices related to nutrition among individuals who had received home economics education. The results revealed that home economics education significantly improved participants' understanding of nutritional concepts, such as the importance of a balanced diet, food hygiene, and proper food storage.

Furthermore, households with members who had received home economics education reported better food security and dietary diversity compared to those without such education. Another important study by Harnack, Story, and Nelson (2014) evaluated the impact of a home economics curriculum that included hands-on cooking classes and nutrition education on middle school students in the United States. The researchers found that students who participated in the program showed increased knowledge about nutrition and improved cooking skills. Additionally, these students reported higher consumption of fruits and vegetables and a greater willingness to try new, healthy foods. The study underscored the effectiveness of experiential learning in home economics education for fostering healthy eating habits among young adolescents.

Nigeria faces significant nutritional challenges that affect a large portion of its population, particularly vulnerable groups such as children, women of reproductive age, and the elderly. These challenges are multifaceted, arising from a combination of socio-economic, environmental, and cultural factors (NPC & ICF, 2019). The major nutritional issues in Nigeria include malnutrition (both under nutrition and over nutrition), micronutrient deficiencies, food insecurity, and the increasing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Addressing the challenges of poor nutrition and low life expectancy requires a multifaceted approach. Enhancing home economics education can be a viable strategy to promote better nutritional practices, thereby improving overall health and extending life expectancy.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this research work is to examine the interplay between home economics and nutritional values and the challenges of increasing life expectancy in Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- i. Examine the impact of home economics education on nutritional knowledge and practices.
- ii. Examine the roles of nutritional on increasing life expectancy in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- i. What is the impact of home economics education on nutritional knowledge and practices in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the roles of nutrition on increasing life expectancy in Nigeria?

Methodology

This study employed descriptive survey research design where questionnaire was used to acquire necessary data for the research work. Population comprises all universities students in Ogun State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select three universities and fifty (50) students were randomly selected from each university to make a total of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents in Ogun State as sample for study. Two (2) research questions were raised and answered in this study. A self-developed questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection contained items on the main title

of study. The instrument was given to experts for construct and content validation. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage, mean and standard deviation statistical tools.

Presentation of Data Analysis and Results

Research Question one: What is the impact of home economics education on nutritional knowledge and practices in Nigeria?

Table 1.

S/N	ITEMS	AGREED		DISAGREED		Mean (\bar{x})	S.D
		Freq (N)	Percent %	Freq (N)	Percent %		
1.	Home economics education has increased my knowledge about balanced diets.	98	65.3	52	34.7	3.65	0.752
2.	I understand the importance of consuming a variety of foods for better health due to home economics education.	143	95.3	7	4.7	3.46	0.692
3.	Home economics education has taught me about the nutritional values of different foods.	121	80.7	29	19.3	3.12	0.827
4.	Home economics education has informed me about the importance of micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) in my diet.	104	69.3	46	30.7	2.86	1.036
5.	My dietary habits have improved as a result of home economics education.	136	90.6	14	9.4	3.19	0.745
Weighted Mean (\bar{x}) = 3.256 and SD = 0.810							

Table 1 above, shows that home economics education has increased my knowledge about balanced diets ($\bar{x} = 3.65$, $SD = 0.752$), understand the importance of consuming a variety of foods for better health due to home economics education ($\bar{x} = 3.46$, $SD = 0.692$), home economics education has taught me about the nutritional values of different foods ($\bar{x} = 3.12$, $SD = 0.827$), home economics education has informed me about the importance of micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) in my diet ($\bar{x} = 2.86$, $SD = 1.036$) and students dietary habits have improved as a result of home economics education ($\bar{x} = 3.19$, $SD = 0.745$).

Research Question two: What are the roles of nutrition on increasing life expectancy in Nigeria?

Table 2.

S/N	ITEMS	AGREED		DISAGREED		Mean (\bar{x})	S.D
		Freq (N)	Percent %	Freq (N)	Percent %		
1.	Proper nutrition can significantly increase life expectancy.	104	69.3	46	30.7	3.09	0.882
2.	Malnutrition is a major factor contributing to low life expectancy in Nigeria.	107	71.4	43	28.6	3.01	0.894
3.	Countries with better nutrition have higher life expectancies.	120	80.0	30	20.0	3.07	0.887
4.	Addressing micronutrient deficiencies (e.g., vitamin A, iron, iodine) can improve overall health and longevity	114	76.0	36	24.0	3.12	0.955
5.	Improved nutritional practices can lead to a reduction in mortality rates from non-communicable diseases.	107	71.3	43	28.7	3.14	0.956
Weighted Mean (\bar{x}) = 3.086 and SD = 0.915							

Table 2 above, indicated that proper nutrition can significantly increase life expectancy (\bar{x} = 3.09, SD = 0.882), malnutrition is a major factor contributing to low life expectancy in Nigeria (\bar{x} = 3.01, SD = 0.894), countries with better nutrition have higher life expectancies (\bar{x} = 3.07, SD = 0.887), addressing micronutrient deficiencies (e.g., vitamin A, iron, iodine) can improve overall health and longevity (\bar{x} = 3.12, SD = 0.955) and improved nutritional practices can lead to a reduction in mortality rates from non-communicable diseases (\bar{x} = 3.14, SD = 0.956).

Discussion of Findings

From table 1 above, research question one (1) has a weighted mean of 3.256 while the benchmark is 2.50. This shows the impact of home economics education on nutritional knowledge and practices in Nigeria. Hence, this finding corroborates the findings of Akinola and Ogunniyi (2019) who revealed that home economics education has impact on household nutrition and food security. Home economics education significantly improved participants' understanding of nutritional concepts, such as the importance of a balanced diet, food hygiene, and proper food storage. Furthermore, households with members who had received home economics education reported better food security and dietary diversity compared to those without such education

From table 2 above, research question 3 has a weighted mean of 3.086 which is above the benchmark of 2.50. This shows the roles of nutrition on increasing life expectancy in Nigeria. The above finding is in congruence with the findings of WHO (2021) which stated that nutrition plays a crucial role in enhancing life expectancy by preventing diseases, promoting health, and supporting the overall well-being of individuals. In Nigeria, addressing nutritional challenges can significantly contribute to improving life

expectancy. Improving nutrition in Nigeria has the potential to significantly increase life expectancy by preventing malnutrition, reducing micronutrient deficiencies, strengthening the immune system, preventing and managing NCDs, enhancing maternal and child health, promoting cognitive development, and ensuring food security.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the interplay between home economics education and nutritional values is pivotal in addressing the nutritional challenges and enhancing life expectancy in Nigeria. Home economics education equips individuals with essential knowledge and practical skills in nutrition, food preparation, and healthy lifestyle choices, which are fundamental in combating malnutrition and diet-related diseases. Through home economics, individuals learn to make informed dietary choices that prevent under nutrition and over nutrition, both of which are prevalent in Nigeria. Moreover, home economics education promotes food security by teaching efficient food utilization and sustainable agricultural practices, which are critical in a country where many regions face food insecurity due to socio-economic and environmental factors. By fostering better nutritional practices, home economics education can enhance maternal and child health, boost cognitive development, and improve overall health outcomes, thereby contributing to increased life expectancy.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.

1. Curriculum planners should modernize the home economics curriculum to include comprehensive, evidence-based information on nutrition, health, and sustainable living practices. They should ensure that the curriculum includes practical, hands-on experiences in cooking, meal planning, budgeting, and food preservation to better prepare students for real-life applications.
2. Government should promote the inclusion of home economics education at all levels of the educational system, from primary to tertiary institutions. They should invest in the professional development of home economics educators to ensure they are well-equipped to deliver high-quality instruction.
3. Community should develop community-based programs that educate families about nutrition and healthy eating habits. These programs can be delivered through local health centers, community groups, and religious organizations.
4. Institutions should integrate nutritional counseling into primary healthcare services, providing personalized dietary advice to individuals and families. Strengthen maternal and child health services to address the nutritional needs of pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and young children.
5. Policy maker should adopt a multi-sectoral approach that involves collaboration between the ministries of health, education, agriculture, and social welfare to address nutritional challenges comprehensively.

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