

Gender Stereotype in Home Economics Programmes in Nigeria: Strategies for Correction

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Abstract

This study was carried out to find out the gender stereotype in home economics programmes in Nigeria and the strategies for correction. In carrying out the work, three research questions were formulated based on the purpose of the study. The data used were obtained by means of questionnaire distributed to 210 male youths in all the 21 local government areas in Anambra State. The data collected were analyzed using mean score. The findings include: the society both educated and uneducated look down on any man studying home economics, parents influencing the career choice of their children, dearth of male of male graduates in home economics, men lacking the knowledge and skill that will help them develop critical inquiry and scientific mind to deal with every day problem appropriately, parent/society changing their perception of job and activities that are for male and which are for females. Based on the findings, recommendations were made which include: students no matter their department should be compelled to study any area of the subject as an elective apart from those that are studying the course.

Key words: Gender, Stereotype, Home Economics, Youth, and Male.

Introduction:

Background of the Study

Home economics education is one of the core vocational subjects that cut across the whole levels of academic system in Nigeria namely: primary, secondary and tertiary levels. This hinges on the fact that the subject is a life supporting subject that has its clients the individual, the families and by implication the whole society.

Different people have defined home economics in different ways according to their own understanding of the concept. All the definitions however, take their bearing from the pool of knowledge expressed in the 1902 definitions of home economics, which saw home economics as the study of laws, conditions, principles and ideas which are concerned on one hand with man's immediate physical environment and on the other hand with his nature as a social being, and is the study especially of the relation between the two factors (Proceedings of 4th Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics, 1902)

However, Ekpeyong (2008) asserted that home economics education is the type of education needed to enhance development. He went further to say that Home economics has persistently identified itself as the right step in the right direction. It has passed the period when it was regarded as only the acquisition of skill in household arts, craft and cooking.

Today, home economics has gone beyond the boundary of focusing attention on the home or family to focusing on the larger society. It has broadened its scope in line with the dynamics of the present realities. Home economics encompasses all areas of food and nutrition, home management, clothing and textile, human and family development, consumer education, interior decoration and child care and management integrating them into all aspects of life.

Writing on the pivotal place of home economics, Anyakoha (2007) noted that home economics is the only course of skill that focused on family well-being as well as opportunities in the job markets.

In Nigeria, it is a thing of surprise and disheartening that males do not enroll in Home economics programmes. They see it as women affairs thus the gender stereotyping in the discipline.

Gender simply means masculine, feminine or neuter. It is the condition of being construct which distinguishes the role behaviour, mental and emotional characteristics between the male and female (Keller, 1991). Its level of demonstration varies with time, place and culture.

Stereotype is used to express something that has become inevitable and static. Oxford Learner's Dictionary (2005) defines stereotype as fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality.

Therefore, gender stereotype is a situation where differential performance/interest of boys and girls are experienced due to culture bias on the role expected of each gender. These differential roles for boys and girls constitute a serious problem to home economics studies. The course is viewed by many people as being good only for the females, which is a very wrong notion.

Based on the above background, the researcher wants to find out the course of this gender stereotype in home economics programme, the effect and ways of correcting it.

Statement of the Problem:

Nigeria today is faced with serious economics and social problems that include unemployment increase in crime, hunger, child trafficking, child abuse etc. Such a country needs functional education that will provide people with source of livelihood of which home economics is one; education that will definitely bring both self and national development.

In utmost dismay, one hardly sees males in home economics programmes at all levels. Females are the sex that always forms the class size. Anyakoha (1997) expressed that the number of males offering home economics in almost all the levels of education in Nigeria is not encouraging. For instance, in the Federal College of Education (Tech), Umunze, no male student has been graduated from the department since its inception (Statistics from the Department of Home Economics, 2013).

Many young males are often without skills and therefore go unemployed. Observably too, the rate of divorce cases instituted by wives against their husbands suggest that their husbands have challenges in the area of home management. Furthermore, there is dearth of males in home economics related vocations and jobs including the teaching profession. All these are consequences of their not being enrolled and therefore not trained in the area of home economics.

Based on the above problems, the researcher wants to find out the causes of gender stereotype in home economics programmes, the effects and strategies for correction.

Purpose of the Study:

The general purpose of this study is to find out the gender stereotype in home economics programmes in Nigeria and strategies for correction. Specifically, the study will find out:

1. Causes of gender stereotyping in Home economics programmes in Nigeria.

2. Effects of gender stereotyping in Home economics programmes in Nigeria.
3. Strategies for correcting the anomaly.

Significance of the Study:

The findings and recommendation of this study will be of tremendous benefit to home economics curriculum planners to outline, efficient strategies for effective teaching of home economics in all levels of education in Nigeria.

The findings will be beneficial to parents, in that it will make them to change their attitude towards the study of Home economics by their male children.

In the present dispensation where youth unemployment is at its peak, the findings of this study will encourage males to study home economics in tertiary institutions for self-employment which will equally reduce crime rate in the society.

Finally, the findings of this study, if adhered to, will go a long way to correct the misconception of seeing Home economics as women subject.

Research Question:

The study will find answers to the following questions:

1. What are the causes of gender stereotyping in home economics programmes in Nigeria?
2. What are the effects of gender stereotyping in home economics programmes in Nigeria?
3. What are the strategies for correcting the misconception?

Research Methodology

Design:

This study was basically a survey research designed to find out causes of gender stereotyping in Home economics programmes, the effect and ways of corrections.

Area of Study:

The study was carried out in Anambra State of Nigeria. The researcher used Anambra State for convenience and to ensure that all the respondents share common socio-cultural environment.

Population of the Study:

The target population for the study consists of all male youths in Anambra State.

Sample/Sampling Technique:

Simple random sampling technique was used to select 10 male youths from each of the 21 local government areas of the state thereby, making the sample size to be 210 male youths.

Instrument for Data Collection:

Questionnaire was the instrument used to elicit information from the respondents; the questionnaire

comprised 26 items structured on a five point Likert rating scale of “Strongly Agree”, “Agree”, “Undecided”, “Disagree”, and “Strongly Disagree”.

Method of Data Collection:

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the 210 respondents by the researcher and her two research assistants. Two weeks were used to travel round the local government areas. In each of the local government area, they administered the questionnaire and waited to collect them back. This was done to ensure hundred percent returns.

Method of Data Analyses:

The data gathered was analyzed using mean. Any response with mean rating of 3.0 or above was regarded as “Agree”, while any response which received a mean score less than 3.0 was regarded as “Disagree”.

Research Findings:

The tables below show the analysis of data related to each research question.

Table 1: Causes of gender stereotype in Home economics programmes in Nigeria.

S/N	Items	Mean	Remark
1	Home economics is a course that deals with domestic affairs hence a course for females.	3.5	Agree
2	Most aspect of home economics depends on direction and rendering of services to others.	3.8	Agree
3	The society, both educated and uneducated look down on any man studying home economics	3.8	“
4	Parents influence on the career choice of their children	3.9	“
5	Text books and diagrams always show males to be doctors and females to be nurses, cake makers, shop assistants e t c	4.0	“
6	Poverty and illiteracy levels on the part of parents.	3.6	“
7	Males are more concerned with careers while females tend to pay more attention to future family improvement.	3.8	“
8	Parents constantly exhibit behavioural traits, attitudes and value system which are basic to special roles.	3.6	“
9	Socio-economic background of parents	3.4	“
10	There is low level awareness among the populace of the areas of home economics.	3.6	“
11	Most males see providing of services in the area related to home economics as befitting only girls.	3.8	“

Table 1 above indicated that the mean rating of the respondents on the causes of gender stereotype in Home economics programmes are higher than the cut-off point of 3.0 in all the eleven items listed. This implies that the statements were accepted as causes of gender stereotyping in Home economics programmes in Nigeria.

Table 2: Effects of gender stereotyping in Home economics programmes in Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean Score	Remark
1.	Most men lack the knowledge and skill that will help them develop critical inquiry and scientific mind to deal with every day problems appropriately.	4.0	Agree
2.	Increase in unemployment especially on the side of our male youths.	3.6	“
3.	Most men cannot manage simple family crises	4.0	“
4.	Most men are consumers of goods and services rather than producers as a result of lack of knowledge and skill or technical-know-how.	3.5	“
5.	Rarely do one see male graduate of home economics education.	4.0	“

Table 2 above shows that respondents accepted that all the items were effects of gender stereotype in Home economics programmes in Nigeria.

Table 3: Strategies for correcting the misconception of gender stereotyping in Home economics programmes in Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean Score	Remark
1	Parents/society should change their perception of which job, activities e t c that is for males and which for females.	4.0	Agree
2.	Boys and girls should be given the early equal opportunity to gain the home economics knowledge and skills	3.8	Agree
3	Gender-orientation illustration in favour of females or males alone should be avoided in text books.	3.6	“
4	Workshops/seminars should be organized in various communities, churches e t c by home economists to enlighten the society on what home economics is all about.	3.6	“
5	Equal opportunities should be given to boys and girls in career choice by parents and teachers.	3.2	“
6.	Career days should be organized from time to time at both the primary and secondary school levels to motivate and stimulate the interest of students	3.6	“
7	Field trips and excursion should be used to stimulate the interest and attract males into Home economics e .g visit to big hotels, tourist centers , food and beverage industries, breweries e t c.	3.8	“
8.	Teachers of Home economics should try and adopt methods of teaching that will encourage and build up worth while interests in the male students	3.2	“
9.	Government should encourage any male studying home economics by giving incentives e.g. scholarship or bursary awards	3.4	
10.	Males should be enlightened by teachers and parents to give up their negative views of Home economics study, which they view as feminine course.	3.2	“

Table 3 above shows that the respondents agreed on all the strategies raised for correcting gender stereotyping in Home economics programmes in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings:

The major findings in table 1 show that Home economics is perceived by many as a course that deals with domestic affair hence a course for females; the society both educated and uneducated look down on any man studying home economics, males are more concerned with careers while females tend to pay attention to future family development, parents influencing the career choice of their children e t c. All the findings are in line with the thought of Agusiobo (1988) when he stated that societal perception of home economics as women's subject or course hinged on the environment. He went further to say that society usually laughs at any man studying home economics. Dike (2006) echoed this notion when he said that the notion dates back to the colonial era hence the perception is difficult to change. These findings are also in line with Nwankwo (2004) when she listed barriers for poor male enrollment in Home economics to include; peer attitude, community attitude, parents attitude e t c. Okoh (2006) also lamented that the short sightedness of the male children is compounded by the decision of their parents about their career.

Table 2 identified the effects of this gender stereotype in home economics programmes in Nigeria to include; men lacking the knowledge and skill that will help them develop critical inquiry and scientific mind to deal with every day problem appropriately, increase in unemployment especially on the side of our male youths e t c. These findings were in line with Adigwe(1992) who stated that females should not be allowed to undertake Home economics alone. Males should equally be encouraged to offer the course so that Nigeria can actualize their vision of making our country one of the buoyant economic nations. He further narrated that the involvement of males and females in the study of home economics will help them to live and survive in this rapid dynamic society so that they would be transformed mentally, physically, and intellectually.

Finally, table 3 also identified the strategies for correcting gender stereotype in home economics programmes in Nigeria to include; parents/society changing their perception of which job and activities that is for males and which is for females, organizing workshop/seminar in various communities, churches e t c by home economists to enlighten the society on what home economics is all about, organizing career days from time to time in both primary and secondary school levels to motivate and stimulate interests and attract males into home economics e. g. visits to big hotels, tourist centers food and beverage industries, breweries e t c, gender-orientation illustration in favour of females or males alone should be avoided in text books e t c. All these findings are in line with Eteng (1989) who said that males' students should be enlightened to give up their negative views of home economics as feminine course. This is due to the fact that home economics is that type of education that would give youth's meaningful orientation towards preparation for the world of work. Apu (1998), also stated that the only way to solve gender stereotype in home economics programmes should be from the roots that is;

- parents should change their perception of which toys, job and activities that are for males and female.
- Books and magazines given to children should not be such that show pictures of boys experimenting in the laboratory or girls cooking in the kitchen e t c
- parents should make career options for boys and girls without any discrimination.
- Girls should not be exposed to domestic work only or to early marriage which sometimes hinders their opportunities of undertaking other courses that male students undertake especially science based courses.

Again Igwenagha (2007) stated that due to the misconception that Home economics is for women, the use of guidance counseling right from primary schools will go a long way in correcting this misconception.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that:

1. Since home economics education deals with all aspects of humanity in meeting his needs and solving his problem, the subject should be made compulsory at both primary and secondary school levels.
2. Students no matter their areas of studying should be compelled to study any area of the subject as an elective apart from those that are offering the course.

Conclusion:

From the result of the investigation, it was established that there is gender stereotype in home economics programmes in Nigeria which could be as a result of so many factors which include; parents influence on the career choice of their children, poverty and illiteracy levels of the parents' etc. All these in turn have so many negative effects on the development of individual, families, society and the nation at large.

Finally, it was revealed that organizing enlightenment programmes for the general public on home economics education is one of the strategies for correcting the misconception since ignorance is the major factor affecting the males, parents, communities and society at large.

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