

Societal and Gender Issues in the Study of Home Economics Education in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract

The paper reviews the gender and societal aspects of Home economics programme, Reasons why there is gender gap in the study of Home economic and the strategies on how to close the gender gap in the study of Home Economics. Also the usefulness of Home Economic to all sexes was discussed. Finally some recommendations were made as the what to be done close the gender gap in the study of Home Economics as trying to make a change on the name given to the course Home economics since it will motivate students more to study the course Home Economics. Also effort should be made to educate parents on trying to identify the potentials in their children before closing a course of study for them. If these are implemented it will surely increase the students enrolment in the study of the Home Economics especially males

Introduction

There are contemporary issues in major areas of Home economics education but for this paper, the social and gender aspects of it will be deal with as it affects Home economics Education.Home economics should be equally accessible to male and female students. But is amazing that as these males and female enter post and teteriary education, large number of them tend lose interest in Home economics. Males are narrowing the gender gap in Home economics Education. In attempting to close the gender gap, (Gender gaps fact sheet 1997) emphasized that the over enrollment of students into other science courses like medicine, computer etc, has risen in these areas with the exception of Home economics in attempting to address this issue, the cause of the discrepancies between males and females in Home economics Education needs to be established in trying to answer some of these questions.

- ❖ What is gender bias?
- ❖ What evidence is there that a Home economics gender gap bias exists?
- ❖ Why do males lose interest in Home Economics
- ❖ What are the differences and similarities between how males and females perceive and study Home economics
- ❖ What Home economics exist? For whom are they intended
- ❖ What role do parents, educators, society have in encouraging Home economics among males?

By addressing these questions, a better understanding of gender gap in Home economics can be attained and solutions to closing the gender gap can be studied. While progress had been made to encourage girls, boys in Home economics, parents, teachers and have just begun to look at males study of Home economics.

Meanwhile, before addressing to the above questions it is very paramount to know the meaning and definitions of Home economics. Home economics is a skill oriented field of study that is capable of equipping learners with skills that create room for self reliance or paid employment which aims at reducing unemployment and improving manpower development.

Leinch (2001) stressed that Home economics is built upon many discipline from which an individual who engaged on it gains that opportunity, experience and skills required for effective output, (Ilinden 1999) pointed out that Home economics is a dynamic and evolving profession. This is because it focuses on the welfare of individuals, families and the society. The various Home economics related occupation makes provision of knowledge and skill to be diversified in the field of the study.

Ekpenyong (2008) asserted that among the areas of education employs to enhance development, Home economics has persistently indentified 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 or just cooking which prevents male's enrollment in the course related areas of the study in higher institutions of learning. Today, Home economics has given the bounding of focusing attention on the home/family to the large society it has broaden its cope in the line with the dynamics of the present to forestall credibility in career establishment as well as skills concrete enough to sustain individuals, family and the nation at large. It encompasses all areas of food and nutrition, Home management, clothing and textiles, child and family living, consumer education etc, hence integrating them into all aspects of life.

Gender in the other hand means masculine, feminine or neuter. It is the condition of being construct which distinguishes the role behavior, mental and emotional characteristics between male and female (Keller 1991). It is expressed in many spares of human endeavour its level of demonstration varies with time, place and culture. It relates to the circumstances of discrimination against a person, politics, religion, economics and social services and determines the level of political and economics empowerment that keep certain group of people at advantage position. In relation to offering Home economics in Tertiary institutions male gender has been a problem and the females mostly undertake the course.

Gender Bias

When examining gender bias, it is vital to define and understand the terms. Since gender is defined as "Sex" and bias is defined as "Preference or inclination that inhabits impartiality; prejudice" (American Heritage, 1986). Thus, gender bias is separation of gender in a way which prefers sex over the other. Gender bias in Home economics refers to preference for or favoring of one sex, one the other in study of Home economics. As can be seen, gender bias in Home economics is a multifaceted and complex issue. Nevertheless, the problem of gender in quality in Home economics is not only a national concern but that of the whole world at large. Thus the misconception of Home economics as a woman's subject/course.

Evidence of Home Economics Gender Gap and Gender Bias

A gender gap exist between males and females in the study of Home economics. An evidence of this gender gap is that the gender starts at home. The home provides the child with first experience, these include the models with which the child can identify, the parents provides a range of materials for home play, there are also value system which are basic to special roles. The children quickly learn that the roles of men in the family are different from the role of women. This differential role

of boys and girls constitute a serious problem to Home economics studies as it affects the male students from undertaking the course.

Often times, subtle message are sent to girls and boys about expectations for their behaviours, attitude, perception and other aspects in their lives. It is important to note that this not always the case nor is necessarily intentional. Many parents, educators and the society out there are indeed very sensitive to the issue of gender. They are making great strides to create equity in all areas for males and females. On the other hand there are those parents, educators who are shocked and surprised to realize that they are unintentionally separate signals about expectations for girls and boys. Differential treatment by educators and parents divert boys from the study of Home economics.

Why males lose interest in the study of home economics.

It is apparent that there is a gender gap in Home Economics, there are variety of theories as to why males lose interest in Home economics. One speculation is that boys simply approach Home economics differently. Some point to parental influence, some blame teachers and the overall educational institution. Still other ideals lay the origins of this gap at role models or lack of role models. Another cause of the gender gap in Home economics is believed to be the society. Although the most common point to a combination of all the factors, each of the major influences will be discussed individually.

Teachers and educational system are believed to influence the gender gap in the study of Home economics Teachers may treat girls differently than boys causing differing expectations for instance; boys and girls are often approached differently when dealing with inappropriate physical and verbal attacks on others. As such boys may want courses that are more tasks oriented that girls (Miller, Chaika, Gropper, 1996).

The lack of strong male role model is believed by some experts to be yet another reason for the gender gap in the study of Home economics between males and females (Swanson, 1999) suggested that providing children the opportunity to see quest speakers from both genders in nontraditional communication careers. Sense tells us that we find possibility or lack of possibility in what we experience. Females who see and develop communication with other females who have careers in science and technology field will be more likely to have these high expectations for themselves. These males will perceive Home economics plausible career for themselves.

(Canter, 1991) said it best that parents are the most important influential people in a child's life. Parental views on gender roles, belief system regarding genders, and actions towards both sexes will inevitably influence children. Children are sent strong signals about the world around them more specifically about men and women, from parents. Parent's actions and words send messages about the parents' beliefs. Parent should closely examine what they say with their action or words.

Okorie and Ezeji (1988) state that some parents are not guiding their male children well to develop interest in the study of Home economics courses. They would want their children to develop interest in Law and Medicine rather than Home economics.

Ossai (2006) emphasized that the influence of parents on the male's interest in the study of Home economics is unquestionably one of the strongest and most persistent factor determining what the child interest in school would be. The socio-economic status of parents can influence students in their choice of course of study to a great extent. Parents from poor socio-economic background would always have greater expectation from the male child and as such would not want them to study Home economics.

The short sightedness of the students is compounded by the decision of their parents about their careers. Parents are often more interested in occupations or profession which will bring money and prestige to the family, then in suitability of their children for a particular career (Okoh, 2006).

It is therefore imperative that parents always set aspirations of their children hence they would not want to send their male children to study what they regard as woman's subject.

Consequently the name given to the course tends to discourage females and males mostly males in studying the course. They would rather prefer if the name given to the course be changed since it will motivate them to study the course. Since the name Home economic makes the course as if it is exclusively for women alone. Thus, women are known to be mostly involved in home domestic works or activities.

The makes interest in the study of Home economic started from home (Ferry 1988) stated that the "root causes of gender gap in Home economics is from home". The home provides the materials for playing role difference which create gender differentials among the children of the home. To curb this problem, we stated that parents should not give room for anything that should create gender difference among the children since this tends to make the children lose interest in some areas of life particularly males that would not want to fall the line of Home economic as a course of study. APU (1998) emphasized that parent should guide and educate male children on the importance of Home economics in societal building since it is going to help the males to Home economics as a course.

In the same vein another issue why males are not interested in the study of Home economics is poor orientation. If males still in secondary schools are given good orientation about the study of Home economics as a course in tertiary institutions the males will study it particularly when the males must have taught about its merits and demerit and career areas that are available to a Home economics it will arouse the males interest for them to know that Home economics is not just all about cooking or domestic works. Dike (2006) suggested that if career days are organized by schools from time to time, it will help motivate and stimulate the interest of students as the students listen to some experts in the various areas Home economics this is because some male students would want to study Home economics but because such students were to shy away from the course whereas it is a course which the students would have done better in than the other courses.

Perception of students on the study of home economics

The student some awakened perception towards the study of Home economics this is as a result of the misconceptions about Home economics.

- Students prefer medicine, law, engineering etc, courses as being suitable for males rather than Home economics
- Students perceive Home economics as a preparatory course for becoming good house wives
- Students perceive Home economic as a domestic affair, hence it a course for females
- From the colonial era till date, Home economics was mainly done by women and as such students see it as a female's course.

Dike (2006) expressed that wrong perception of Home Economics dated back from the colonial era this makes it difficult for the perception to change. Bound and Hapson (1989) stated that boys are more concerned with careers that will make quick money while girls tend to pay more attention to future family improvement.

The student perceive Home Economics as to do with the home, since it deals with different food preparation and serving of meals, decoration of home and its surroundings, making of cloths, child care etc, as such the students do not see as a course for males since it deals with domestic affairs. Males perceive Home economics as a course which makes a person savant and not a master. Males look at medicine, law engineering as being suitable for them, because the males feel is a lucrative and notable professions for reliable and successful men. These make men to be proud, have prestige and become wealthy; men from these fields are maters and directors not servants if the males should study Home economics.

According to Agusiono (1988) variety of factors both within individual and within the environment are assessed as factors for males for enrolment on the study of Home economics, therefore the perception of Home economics as woman's subject or course hinged on the educated look down on any men who studied or is studying Home Economics. Thus, this does not encourage me to study Home economics.

Boys and girls should have practical interest in home planning, budgeting, production of and preparation of food for home use. Males students would not went to join Home economics; the males feel that those areas are not for them. They see it as that Education without home and family living education can still be complete. But it is so paramount that both males and females, in that for takes a man and women to make a family and the family is the neutering centre for human behavior personality. Actually, observation have been made on gender imbalance in Home economics, males would not went to study Home economics subjects because they see it is being tedious for them to practice it they would rather go for a more profiting subject like medicine, law, etc.

It is not surprising that students are not interested in Home economics subjects/courses. Osuala (1994) emphasized that, at the heart of our society and economics problem is a national attitude that implies that vocation subjects (Home economics) are designed for somebody else's children and is meant primarily for the children of the poor, for the dropout, and the less intelligent. This attitude is shared by students. Hence, it makes them to lack interest in the study of the course. Nigeria has promoted the ideal that the only good education is the Education capped for period of time.

The Home Economics that exist and to whom it intended

Home Economics courses are existing in secondary and Tertiary Institution for boys and girls to study unfortunately males do not really part take in the study of this course especially at Tertiary level, therefore it could be of almost important to let the female and male of to help encourage them to study the course. Some time males do not know what this Home economics is made of, they see it as course for cooking and eating alone, thus attributing it to course for females alone not knowing that the course Home economics is much more than that and this are what the unite is going to explore.

Home economics with so many areas, it is so versatile that is embraces all other areas. But basically, it is made up of three areas namely:-

- Foods and nutrition
- Clothing and textiles
- Home management /family living
- Child development

Home economics is among the major courses offered in Teteiary Institution, which one of the objectives of teaching Home economics in Teteiary institution is to ensure that each student is able

to explain the principles of Home economics and demonstrates skills and other abilities directly related to job that is done (Anozie, 2006) Home economics Education is yearned towards equipping individuals with saleable skills that make them self – reliant. It exposes individuals to many occupational areas of skills in craft work, clothing manufacturing, tailoring, fashion designing, baking, laundry, hotel management. All these and many others which males and females do not know and that is why they run away from offering the course.

Iloje (1999) state that the different areas of Home economics have career options that can keep the graduates gainfully employed where they cannot get paid employment jobs. These are what the males do not know rather they would prefer to study courses that after graduating could not find job while most of these males have the potentials and the skills and all that it takes to be a Home economics instead they would rather not study than to do a course in Home economics.

Alternately, the students would know and might require some body to guide them aright and encourage studying Home Economics.

Career options in home economics are as follows:-

- Nursery school management
- Interior decoration
- Hotel management
- Cloth manufacturing
- Craft work
- Tailoring
- Fashion designing
- Baking
- Opening a snack shop
- Opening of fast food shops
- Lauding services
- Industrial cafeteria management
- Street food vending
- Rug cleaning services
- Hair dressing salon
- Soap and pomade making
- Pattern making
- Day care centers
- Dyeing
- Teaching
- Marriage counselors etc.
- Wedding & Birthday Decorations.

These careers are the jobs areas that male and females that study Home economics can get involved in this they should be encouraged to study the course hence this will make the students to be self-reliant on graduation rather than waiting for Government employment. The situation of Nigeria now is such that the government is not ready to provide job for youths therefore, the study of Home economics by males could make a difference in trying to reduce poverty and unemployment in the country.

Home Economics for males

Males need Home economics just as females. A male is a member of the family as a husband or father, and traditionally the head of the family. As such these males need appropriate knowledge,

attitudes, and skills for their roles as husband, father, consumer and self-reliant citizens. They need to know how to budget, prioritize needs, and manage available resources to line happily these can be achieved through the study of Home economics. If men should study Home Economics there are lots of benefits accuracy from the study of Home economics for the men.

Benefit of Home Economics for Men

One benefits of Home Economics to males is proper managements. Males need to study Home economics to enable them know to manage the available resource like money affectively. Some times males may not like to marry early as very body experiences a period of single independent living during such periods in life males may be faced with choice and preparation of food, living within a budget, taking care of a house and their clothing at this stage it is certain that some knowledge in aspect of Home economics will be helpful to them. Through the study of Home economics males will be equipped better for the situations in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills useful to them in present and in future.

Everybody is a consumer and a money manager therefore, males need to know how to manage money wisely, prepare meals, make simple clothing choices and repairs, look after and play with children and it is only Home economics that can assist them in assuming these responsibilities.

Since Home economics is known to be a family oriented discipline and families are made up of males and females, both sexes should be exposed to Home economics for its accuracy benefits. Presently many family members are now more independent and affluent than decades ago. They prefer to buy things themselves new and possibly more expensive wise money spending and how to prioritize needs. Thus, the need for value clarification, these could be taught through Home Economics.

Therefore, if Home economics have such utility values for males, then the issue is why many men's not studying Home economics are: The following are some of the prevailing factors to be looked into as: (Nwankwo 2004)

- a. Community attitude
- b. Peer attitude
- c. General attitudes for individuals
- d. Parents attitudes
- e. Teachers attitude
- f. Resources materials

Community Attitude – Communities' attitude towards sex roles and behavior come to play in this. If everything about food, clothing and house care come under the domain of the women, it may be difficult to accept such related courses. Dowell and Greenwood (1975) opined that a cookery class regarded as "not for boy", then, if the same course is termed "bachelor survival" or a clothing course labeled "bachelor's endeavours, boy will be interested.

Peer Attitudes – Most often teenagers abhor doing anything that will tarnish their ego before friends such males would rather not go into anything that would not gain peers approval. Therefore, if Home economics has this "females only" the image will then affect male enrolment.

General Attitude for individuals – Most individuals are still observed with the 18th century concept of Home economics – that it is of cooking and eating. Thus you find men in influential positions and even parents allowing ignorance to guide their views about Home economics. This group of

individuals discourages even girls from studying the course not to mention males. The issue is that these people are not fully aware of what Home economics can offer. Even at Tertiary levels, Admission personnel's advise some youths (Boys and Girls) against the study of Home economics. When such advice is given, males "swallow" it easily.

Parents Attitude – Most parents like deciding for their children and this affects their choice for study of Home economics. These parents often have a stereotyped idea of what a male child and female child should do. These parents would want their children to be engineers, doctors, thereby biasing the child's mind and at times confusing the child. As such for not giving child the opportunity to make choices affects the student enrolment to Home economics.

Teacher Attitude – Home economics teachers have the capacity to determine the success or failure of the course. Most Home economics teachers do not even encourage males to study the course. They would rather prefer girls to boys studying Home economics because most teachers see males as difficult people to teach.

Resource materials – Resources materials especially text books are not geared towards males. All illustrations are females gender-oriented and content is gender biased to in favour of the females.

In relation to the above Lawson (1977) noted that subject (Home economics) which deals so vitally with life, the home and home problems should be made available for men and if left predominately as an arena for women action and opinion, that it has no right to speak or take action for the family. So, for Home Economics to adequately serve the family as a body, the profession must have to be for both men and women along.

Roles of parents, educators, society in encouraging home economics among males

Those around young boys have great potential to influence their perception of themselves and other in relation to Home economics parents has the greatest potential to influence their children. Teachers and Educational system also have the ability to shape the self-image and future of boys as they approach Home economics and Home economics fields. Though it can be argued that they have less influence, peers and community take part in encouraging or discouraging males in the study of Home economics. The educational systems and teachers have the ability to help boys overcome gender gap in Home economics (Canter 1991).

If the boys are to be more involved in Home economics, we must begin with parents. There are many practical and easy way parents can encourage boys in the study of Home economics. Parents can begin at home to encourage boys to study Home economics. Children should be exposed to Home economics at early age, children should learn the cooking, homemaking and Home economics generally is fun and useful to everyone. They should be made to see it as one of the many tools an individual should have to make life easier. When children are especially male children are ready to be active participants of household chores, parents should be ready with the opportunities to use it. Parents should also buy those household equipment that will help to make them develop interest in doing some chores at home such as labour saving devices. Parents should help the boys develop these skills in Home economics and encourage the males to cook with them and do certain things together. The one-on-one interaction between mother and sons can be greatly beneficial to both the mother and the child. Discussing Homemaking is another way parents could encourage the study of Home economics. Parents should ask their children about their likes and dislikes of Home economics. Parents should be role models to their children this is because often

children imitate parents priorities, attitude, and actions. When parents talk about Home economics comfortably in their daily lives both for entertainment and in their professions, their children will be more like to do the same.

Gender gap sheet, (1997) suggested that parents position can influence gender equity in Home economics at school as well as at home. Mothers can be involved in school by being a teacher's aids in Home economics laboratories. They can offer to be guest speakers or mentors for their own sons or other sons. Parents can also be involved at the administrative level parents can narrow gender gap by being volunteers for clubs or other Home economics associations. Parents can be powerful advocate of their children at school.

In the same vein while parents have the greatest ability to influence their children, those involved in the educational system have the capacity to play great roles in narrowing the gender gap as well. Those at in administrative position within school should use both money and influence to express their priorities, since the school administration have the potentials to be a powerful starting point for gender equity. Consequently, the school administration is powerless to make boys accept Home Economics without the help of teachers, next to parents. Teachers are extremely influence on the attitude or perceptions of the children.

Girls and boys have tendency to view Home economics differently, "Girls see Home Economics as a mean of achieving concrete goal. Boys cooking, or homemaking but still a medium with which to accomplish a task". (Chaika, 1999). It is essential to make a note about the role of parents, teachers and societal influences in addressing gender bias in Home Economics. As any successful teacher knows, all children are different. Every boy is a unique individual with different needs, interests, educators, aspirations and goals in life. Therefore parent, educators of Home Economics must keep this in mind as they work on behalf of boys and with boys to eliminate the gender gap in the study of Home Economics.

Additionally, male students should enlighten to give up their negative views of Home Economics study, which they viewed as a affinitive course and others. This idea was backed Bell and Vogel (1995) When they started the sole responsibility of home economics education in particular. This is because it makes the young people in our society to live meaningfully creatively and with enjoyment and fulfilled life.

Recommendation

Strategies for minimizing gender gap in the aspect of Home economics the following recommendation were made:-

- a. The wrong conception and perception of Home Economics as woman subject should be changed through public enlightenment programme.
- b. Parents should be educated through media on the importance of career opportunities in Home Economics.
- c. Exhibitions, field trip should be used to encourage the males in studying Home Economics
- d. Career days/orientation should be organized from time to time for primary and secondary school students.
- e. The use of film projectors, video tapes etc. on importance and career opportunities in Home economics in primary school and village squares on regular bases will help to encourage the males.
- f. School should ensure effective guidance and counseling many schools. This is to ensure that the pupils from day one to understand the concept of Home Economics its importance.

- g. The teachers of Home economics, the government, and the curriculum planners should join hands to ensure that the name "Home Economics could be changed to something better to ensure if changed of name could attract more males and females to study the course.

Conclusion

Home economics is the one of the courses that has the individual and the family as its central focus. It is a subject of great value to the family and its members through improving the well-being of the members, since the family in all cultures is the cover stone of any society. Therefore, as a result of the importance of Home economics that are numerous, it is paramount that Home Economics be made available for both males and females because its focus allows no room for gender discrimination.

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