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HOME ECONOMICS CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT NEEDS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY LABOUR MARKET: A QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract
This study explores the home economics curriculum improvement needs in Colleges of Education (COE) level in Niger State. The reasons for the study is to ensure that the curriculum aligned with the technology-driven 21st-century labor market. The design for the study was a qualitative research design. The researcher sampled 11 stakeholders for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The stakeholders include experts in home economics, and technologist. The instrument for data collection was semi-structured interview. Member checking was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The data collected were analysed using Thematic Analysis. The findings of the study disclosed that there is significant deficit in digital technology integration and a mismatch between classroom practical and industrial standards. The study concludes that standardizing the curriculum to incorporate high-tech vocational competencies and "E-Entrepreneurship" is essential for producing teachers capable of driving economic sustainability. Recommendations emphasize the urgent need for digital laboratories and mandatory technological re-skilling for academic staff.
Keywords: Home Economics, Curriculum improvement needs, Economic development and Sustainability

Introduction

Home Economics is one of the vocational and technical education courses in Nigeria, it is a vast field of study that instills in its students theoretical and practical content in the areas of Food and Nutrition, Clothing and Textiles, Home Management as well as Family relationship and Child development in order to be self - reliant (Carahel 2016). Home Economics as a course of study teaches students practical skills, knowledge and competencies necessary for daily living and for meeting life challenges in the home and society (Bamali,2013). Gamawa (2015) stated that the basic aim of Home Economics is to equip learners with knowledge and skills necessary to lead an effective productive life. At the Colleges of Education level, the objectives of Home Economics are fundamentally designed to bridge the gap between academic theory and vocational proficiency, specifically focusing on the training of teachers who can translate these practical competencies into economic opportunities for their students.

According to Chukwuka and Apaokueze (2023), the primary objective of Home Economics in Colleges of Education is to equip pre-service teachers with specialized competencies in areas such as Food and Nutrition, Clothing and Textiles, Home Management as well as Family relationship and Child development ensuring they can foster self-reliance among their future students. This objective is critical for national development, as it transforms Home Economics from a domestic-centered subject into a robust engine for economic empowerment and poverty alleviation. Anyanwu (2020) stated that the core objective of home economics is develop entrepreneurial agility to students which will enable them to teach and also be self- reliant. It therefore means that home economics focus on providing students with skills and knowledge required for family welfare and resource management, teaching and self -reliance.

Despite the potential of Home Economics in providing self-employed skills to students, the problem of inadequate competent teachers exacerbates the situation rendering the graduates unemployable as they lack necessary skills and competence required (Azonuche,2020). Muhammed and Sikiru (2023) reported that majority of Nigerian students lack adequate modern employability skills and knowledge. Ita and Bassy (2022) lamented that the rate of unemployment among Nigerian youth is growing at a very alarming rate, out of the 140 million youth, up to 120 million are unemployed. The core problem lies in the widening skills gap between what is provided and what is expected. Thus, the current curriculum of Home Economics at Colleges of Education which should consists of carefully mapped out programmes of what to teach, and how to teach so as to get the values, dreams and the desires of a nation better interpreted remains largely stagnant, utilizing

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obsolete equipment and pedagogical methods that do not reflect 21st-century technological advancements (Onuoha, Chukwuone, Dimelu & Anowai,2020). Consequently, the graduates of Home Economics risks losing its relevance as a tool for economic empowerment and national development. However, the traditional boundaries of the subject once centered primarily on domestic efficiency need to be radically redefined to meet up with the 21st-century global economy demands.

The global 4th Industrial Revolution, it is expected that educational institutions should focus on changing the manual skills to advanced, technology-integrated practices. To achieve lasting economic sustainability in Nigeria, the curriculum must change its bearing beyond the current teaching and learning provided to students to technological and entreprenrial training that are in line with the demands of the modern labor market. This according to Chukwuka and Apaokueze (2023) will help in ensuring that the home economics remains a powerful tool for innovation and self-reliance. In an era where digital literacy and entrepreneurial agility are the primary currencies of the labor market, Home Economics must be standardized to reflect industry-grade benchmarks. The integration of modern technology and high-intensity practical is no longer a peripheral addition but a mechanical necessity to ensure that upon graduation, pre-service students can mentor the next generation of Nigerian youth to become productive participants in a competitive, knowledge-based economy (Okafor, 2021).

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To sought for the views of the participants on the digital technology to be integrated into the current Home Economics instructional delivery at Colleges of Education in Niger State.
2. To investigate the participant's responses on the modern practical competencies in food & nutrition, clothing & textile, home management as well as family relationship & child development required for inclusion in the NCE Home Economics curriculum.
3. To explore the views of the participants on the infrastructural requirements necessary for transitioning from traditional domestic-based practical to industry-aligned vocational Home Economics.
4. To identify the barriers hindering the effective implementation of a technology-rich and practical-oriented Home Economics curriculum in Colleges of Education.

Methodology

This study adopted a Qualitative Research Design to solicit for the views of stakeholders on the need for curriculum improvements. The researcher sampled 11 stakeholders for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The stakeholders include experts in home economics, and technologist. The instrument for data collection was semi-structured interview. Member checking was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The primary method of data collection was the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) using semi-structured interview. The participants were purposively sampled from two major institutions: Federal University of Education, Kontagora, and Niger State College of Education, Minna. The groups consisted of senior lecturers, curriculum coordinators, and final-year NCE students. Three FGD sessions were conducted to elicit reflections on technological gaps and industry expectations. The data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns related to technical obsolescence and resource management.

Results

Objective 1: Views on Digital Technology Integration in Home Economics Instruction

Theme 1: Adoption of E-learning and Smart Teaching Tools

Participants emphasized the need to integrate Learning Management Systems (LMS), virtual classrooms, and multimedia instructional tools into Home Economics teaching. These technologies were seen as enhancing lesson delivery, accessibility, and student engagement.

"Digital platforms will make practical demonstrations clearer and accessible beyond the classroom."

Theme 2: Use of Simulation and Demonstration Technologies

Stakeholders highlighted the relevance of video demonstrations, virtual labs, and simulation software for teaching practical skills such as cooking techniques and textile design.

"Students can learn procedures through videos before actual practice, improving understanding."

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Theme 3: Digital Literacy as a Core Competency

Participants stressed that both lecturers and students must develop basic ICT skills, including the use of digital tools for teaching, learning, and assessment.

"Technology integration will only succeed if both teachers and students are digitally competent."

Theme 4: Blended Learning Approach

There was strong support for combining traditional practical methods with digital tools, rather than replacing hands-on learning entirely.

"Technology should complement, not replace, practical experiences."

The participants were of the views that while the global labor market has transitioned to modern technology and high-intensity practical approach, the current pedagogical approach used for teaching the students remains heavily reliant on traditional, labor-intensive methods. In the area of area of Clothing and Textiles specifically, the experts noted that students are proficient in manual needlework but lack exposure to Computer-Aided Pattern Drafting (CAPD) or industrial embroidery machines, which are standard requirements for modern fashion entrepreneurship. The interviewed shows that the deficit in the technological integration creates a vacuum where the final year students feel unprepared to guide for 21st century labour market needs.

Objective 2: Modern Practical Competencies Required in the Curriculum

Theme 1: Industry-Relevant Culinary and Nutrition Skills

Participants identified the need for competencies such as modern food processing, nutrition planning, food safety standards, and catering services.

"Students should be trained in contemporary food services, not just traditional cooking."

Theme 2: Fashion Design and Textile Innovation Skills

Stakeholders emphasized skills in computer-aided design (CAD), garment construction, branding, and entrepreneurship in fashion.

"Fashion today is digital; students must learn design software and branding."

Theme 3: Home Management and Entrepreneurship Competencies

Modern skills such as event management, interior decoration, budgeting, and small business management were highlighted.

"Graduates should be job creators, not just job seekers."

Theme 4: Family Life and Child Development Skills

Participants noted the importance of parenting education, counselling skills, and emotional intelligence in family and child development.

"Understanding modern family challenges is essential for effective teaching."

According to the interview, the participants argued that theory covers significant part of the current curriculum contents of the programme. Consequently, the curriculum allocated too much time to abstract and theoretical expects of Home management rather than high-intensity, industry-aligned practical. In the Food & Nutrition modules, the findings show that students are significantly trained using domestic-grade kitchen equipment, which fails to prepare them for the rigors of industrial catering or professional food service. The participants lamented that there is no standardization in the curriculum contents. Consequently, there is need for adoption of industrial-grade tools in the Home Economics laboratories to bridge the gap between classroom learning and the actual demands of the food service sector.

Objective 3: Infrastructural Requirements for Industry-Aligned Training

Theme 1: Modern Laboratories and Workshops

Participants stressed the need for well-equipped kitchens, textile studios, and home management laboratories that reflect industry standards.

"Facilities should mirror what students will meet in the real world."

Theme 2: ICT Infrastructure and Internet Access

Reliable internet connectivity, computers, projectors, and digital devices were identified as essential for technology integration.

"Without internet and digital tools, technology integration is impossible."

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Theme 3: Industry Linkages and Training Facilities
Stakeholders emphasized partnerships with industries, vocational centres, and private enterprises for practical exposure.
"Students should have opportunities for industrial training and internships."
Theme 4: Maintenance and Sustainability of Facilities
Participants noted the importance of **regular maintenance and upgrading of facilities** to ensure long-term usability.
"Providing facilities is not enough; they must be maintained."
The participants expressed concern over the current curriculum of Home Economics as not being in agreement with the global economy trends. One of the participants stated that, where physical markets are sometimes disrupted by insecurity, the next option should be e-business which is lacking in the curriculum. It was reported by the participants that the current curriculum, however, lacks modules on social media marketing, digital inventory management, and mobile payment integration. Students specifically mentioned that learning to produce a product is only half the battle; without the digital skills to market and sell those products in a virtual marketplace, their vocational training remains geographically and economically restricted.

Objective 4: Barriers to Implementation of Technology-Rich Curriculum
Theme 1: Inadequate Funding
A major challenge identified was insufficient funding for equipment, infrastructure, and training programmes.
"Without proper funding, implementation will remain theoretical."
Theme 2: Limited ICT Skills among Lecturers
Participants observed that many lecturers lack the technical skills required for digital teaching.
"Some teachers are not comfortable using modern technologies."
Theme 3: Poor Infrastructure
Challenges such as unstable electricity supply, lack of equipment, and inadequate facilities were highlighted.
"Power supply issues make it difficult to use digital tools effectively."
Theme 4: Resistance to Change
Some stakeholders noted reluctance among educators to adopt new teaching methods.
"There is resistance to moving away from traditional methods."
Theme 5: Policy and Implementation Gaps
Participants pointed out weak policy enforcement and lack of clear implementation strategies.
"Policies exist, but implementation is the real problem."
The interview conducted suggested that even when lecturers are willing to innovate, erratic power supply hampered the curriculum implementation. It was reported by the participants that lack of high-speed internet, and the absence of specialized software for food & nutrition, clothing & textiles, home management and interior design affect the skills and knowledge acquire by home economics students. Consequently, there is need for notable capacity development and provision of modern technological gadgets in Home economics.

Discussion of the Findings
Digital Technology Integration in Home Economics Instruction
The findings revealed a strong consensus among participants on the importance of integrating digital technologies such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), virtual simulations, and multimedia tools into Home Economics instruction. This suggests a growing recognition of the role of technology in enhancing teaching effectiveness and student engagement. This finding aligns with global trends in educational technology, which emphasize blended learning approaches as a means of improving instructional delivery (Anyanwu, 2020). The participants' preference for combining traditional practical methods with digital tools supports the argument that technology should complement rather than replace hands-on experiences, especially in skill-based subjects like Home Economics. Furthermore, the emphasis on digital literacy for both lecturers and students reflects the increasing demand for 21st-century skills in education (Azonuche, 2020). This is consistent with studies that highlight the need for teachers to be technologically competent in order to effectively implement digital curricula. However, the concern about inadequate ICT skills among educators indicates a gap between policy expectations and actual practice, suggesting the need for continuous professional development.

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Modern Practical Competencies for Curriculum Inclusion

The study identified a shift from traditional domestic-oriented skills to industry-relevant and entrepreneurial competencies in areas such as food and nutrition, clothing and textiles, home management, and family life education. Participants emphasized skills such as food safety, catering services, fashion design technology, event management, and business development (Ita & Bassy, 2022). This reflects a broader transformation in vocational education, where the focus is increasingly on employability, innovation, and self-reliance. The findings support the view that curricula should be responsive to labour market demands and societal changes (Onuoha, Chukwuone, Dimelu & Anowai, 2020). By advocating for entrepreneurship and digital skills, participants highlighted the need for graduates to become job creators rather than job seekers. In addition, the inclusion of counselling and emotional intelligence skills in family and child development indicates an awareness of contemporary social challenges. This aligns with current educational priorities that emphasize holistic development, including cognitive, emotional, and social competencies.

Infrastructural Requirements for Industry-Aligned Training

Participants identified the need for modern laboratories, ICT infrastructure, and industry linkages as critical to transitioning from traditional to industry-aligned Home Economics education. This underscores the importance of learning environments that simulate real-world conditions, enabling students to acquire practical and relevant skills. The emphasis on ICT infrastructure and reliable internet access reflects the central role of technology in modern education. Without adequate facilities, the integration of digital tools remains ineffective (Chukwuka & Apaokueze, 2023)). This finding is consistent with existing research, which identifies infrastructure as a key determinant of successful educational innovation. Moreover, the call for partnerships with industries highlights the importance of experiential learning, such as internships and industrial training. Such collaborations bridge the gap between theory and practice, enhancing students' readiness for the workforce (Okafor, 2021). However, the concern about maintenance and sustainability of facilities points to a recurring issue in many educational institutions, where infrastructure is often provided but not adequately maintained. This suggests the need for long-term planning and resource management.

Barriers to Implementation of Technology-Rich Curriculum

The findings revealed several barriers, including inadequate funding, limited ICT competence among lecturers, poor infrastructure, resistance to change, and policy implementation gaps. These challenges collectively hinder the effective transformation of Home Economics education. Inadequate funding emerged as a major constraint, affecting the availability of equipment, infrastructure, and training opportunities (Carahel, 2016). This is consistent with studies that identify financial limitations as a primary obstacle to educational reform in developing contexts. The issue of limited ICT skills among lecturers further complicates implementation, as technology integration depends heavily on the capacity of educators. This highlights the need for continuous professional development and training programmes to equip teachers with the necessary skills (Bamali, 2013). Resistance to change among some educators reflects the challenges associated with adopting new pedagogical approaches. This suggests that successful curriculum reform requires not only resources but also attitudinal change and institutional support. Additionally, policy implementation gaps indicate that while frameworks for curriculum improvement may exist, their execution is often weak (Gamawa, 2015). This underscores the importance of effective monitoring, evaluation, and enforcement mechanisms.

Conclusion

The discussion demonstrates that while there is a clear vision for transforming Home Economics education in Colleges of Education in Niger State, achieving this transformation requires addressing both structural and human capacity challenges. By aligning curriculum content with industry needs, investing in infrastructure, and enhancing teacher competence, the programme can become more relevant, practical, and responsive to contemporary societal demands. The results of the study indicated that there is curriculum gap, thus, it was concluded that for Home Economics to drive economic sustainability in Niger State, the curriculum of Home Economics must undergo a technological integration. This will help to bridge the observed technological gaps.

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Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended that:

1. The Niger State Government and NCCE should fund the establishment of Digital Home Economics Laboratories equipped with CAD and industrial food technology
2. The state government should establish a formal policy for continuous professional development in Digital Pedagogy for all vocational lecturers
3. The National Council on Education should ensure that Home Economics curriculum are restructured to favor a 70% practical-to-theory ratio aligned with modern industry benchmarks.

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