

## TRENDS IN HOME ECONOMICS: AN EMPLOYMENT GENERATING PROFESSION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by

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### **Abstract**

Home economics is a rich profession. It is bewildered with vocations and careers like teaching and floristry. As a noble profession, it is affected by some new areas of trends intensity. This study exhumes some trending issues in home economics as a vocational and career discipline and elucidates some challenges facing it without which its multi-faceted approaches in human ecology would sufficiently widen its propensity through incorporating ingredients in science and technology to boost employment for the citizenry for national development.

**Key words:** *Trends, Home Economics, Employment, Profession, National Development.*

### **Introduction**

Formalized home economics was traced from traditional upbringing of children, when girls were exchanged among close relatives as wards. These wards were informally trained to acquire relevant traditional skills in home-making such as ‘learning to maintain codes of conducts in preparation for their future roles as wives’ and ‘developing wholesome personalities in order to enjoy happy human relationships.’ This study sets out to determine the trends in home economics in the contemporary era and to justify how far these have affected development or

otherwise of the discipline as well as elicit effects of such trends in the area as an employment generation profession for individuals that boosts national development.

### **Trends in Home Economics**

In the beginning home economics was tied to training of girls on domestic chores in their homes. This informed Nosow’s (1964), insistence that the discipline should develop a cohesive organization and build its roles around researches and specialized applied activities. Brown (1991) explained that if home economics were to establish

itself as a profession, it might be based on logical foundations of knowledge as well as altruistic values – for a profession must have a commitment to itself as well as to society. He believed that prospective members of the profession should be rigorously chosen from among those who were likely to represent it best in order to achieve such objective.

The need for home economics pedagogy in the developing nations of the world like Nigeria is, therefore, imperative. Specialists from other countries might benefit from studying home economics in the country for international exchanges of professionalism in the discipline which is another emerging trending opportunity. The specialized knowledge of the home economists should be of increasing importance in such wide current concerns as the consumer movement, the establishment of day-care centers, the role of women, political disorganizations, pollution and many more (Agwasim & Yaroson, 1995).

Requirements to professionalize distinct new scopes of home economics such as in depth researches based on logical foundations of knowledge as well as their intrinsic values are paramount. These necessitate trends which bewilder home economics as a profession (Cleveland, 1964). Such trends include widening the scope of home economics curricular as an inter-disciplinary, inter-dimensional, multi-dimensional and cross-cultural profession beyond its present status. This should be made possible by tacit contribution of science and technology to human development which have brought about more diffused extensive dynamic scientific knowledge of different types of foods, clothing, home management styles, distinct child psychology development patterns of diverse peoples for human well-being and society serenity across the globe.

Although such other disciplines as chemistry, mathematics, biology, physics, philosophy, psychology, sociology, political science, economics, biochemistry, arts are already en vogue in home economics as inter-disciplinary areas in its integrating functions to family and society (Nosow, 1964), some other inter-faceted inter-disciplinary areas as anthropology, zoology, history; multi-disciplinary areas as nutrition and dietetics, wild life; multi-dimensional areas as home management, child psychology and development and cross-cultural areas as culture and civics and many more should be duly incorporated to adequately tackle upheavals prohibiting infusion of trends in the discipline.

From the early beginnings of home economics at Boston enhanced by Lake Placid Conferences of 1899 through 1908, organizations, committees and official associations cropped up with common themes which bound the field with several trending innovations. Such organizations included the American Home Economics Associations 1913; Committee on the Philosophy and Objectives of Home Economics 1959 (Lee & Dressel, 1963). Over time, home economics was organized in three ways as a single field, a collection of specialists and as a unified whole (American Home Economics Association, 1975).

The striking thing about how girls learned those arts and trades in the past was mainly through imitation and observation. The traditional teachers, masters or mistresses merely kept watchful eyes on the young apprentices and corrected their mistakes by reprimanding them (Tate, 1973). Then, traditional training in home economics together with the scope of the discipline was parochial and limited to goals which were basically training of the females mainly on jobs, skills and family life-styles. The aim of this singular goal-oriented

training was to meet the immediate basic needs of the female children within their restricted environment (Allen, 1999).

This form of apprenticeship training in home economics was rather conservative and conforming. It was not meant to train the girls to challenge or change those aspects that are now considered unprogressive within their existing cultural systems. It was rather direct and informal and meant to serve the time's domestic needs. They learned traditional agriculture like farming, business activities such as buying and selling of farm products, acquired relevant traditional skills in home making like maintaining a code of conduct in preparation for their future roles as wives, and developed a wholesome personality to enjoy happy human relationships (Henderson, 1954). All these brought about new trends in the discipline.

### **Home Economics programmes at various levels of Education in Nigeria**

Home economics was earlier conceived of as a programme for women and girls, later evolved to contribute for the education of men and boys as well. This type of education was provided for through formal school situations which availed them of education in various other programmes related to home economics such as Adult Education. Thus, home economics at both elementary and secondary school levels later speedily eluded its past connotation of being 'cooking' and 'sewing' and has become family-oriented programme with its chief purpose to help children and youths (including adults) to become happy and understanding members of families and useful persons in the societies. In the elementary school, the emphasis focused on the child and his life in the family (Olaitan & Agusiobo, 1981).

At the junior secondary school level, the emphasis centered on roles of adolescent in

his family, his responsibilities and how he can be of service to others. At the senior secondary school level, the emphasis deepened to developing abilities necessary for a well-managed and satisfying home life. These programmes differed from one school system to another, but generally more attention was placed on such areas as housing, child development, family and social relationships and personal development, while less attention centered on food preparation and clothing construction (Okoli, 1992).

At the college and university levels, home economists recognized the purposes of home economics as being four-folds, namely:

1. To make a contribution to the education for family living of all college students;
2. To prepare both home economics majors and non-home economics majors for homemaking;
3. To provide education for home economics majors for professions related to home and family life; and
4. To contribute to the enrichment of the professional training for students preparing for other fields.

An increasingly important part of the responsibility of home economists at the college level is to prepare young men and women for the dual roles of home making and additional jobs.

Concurrently, the college prepares young men and women for the vocations closely allied to or within the field of home economics such as teaching at all levels, dietetics, social welfare, institutional management, radio and television home service with production of household equipment and services, journalism, designing, retailing, researches in business, industry and education and extension works (Hall & Paulocci 1970).

Home economics contributes to the general education programmes of both young men and women today. At the college level, as in secondary programme, there has been a change from an emphasis on skills such as food preparation, to courses dealing with family programmes offered for both sexes. Home economics profession encourages integration of inter-disciplinary and multi-faceted disciplines in making education for home and family living available to all students (Arny, 1952).

### **Some Roles of Home Economics**

Home economics roles to individuals, families and the societies further expanded to include:

1. Family relationships and child development;
2. Consumption and other economic aspects of personal and family living;
3. Nutritional needs in the selection, preparation, preservation and use of foods;
4. The design, selection, construction and care of clothing, and its psychological and social significance;
5. Textiles for clothing and for the home;
6. Housing for the family and equipment;
7. Furnishings for the household;
8. Art, as an integral part of everyday life; and
9. Managing resources so that the values and goals of the individual, the family and the society will be attained (Tate, 1973).

Home economics is today 'education for living.' That is, it is the study of everything that involves or relates to the individual, home, family and the society. Home economics now advances a wide area of learning as a unified whole and

consequently a teacher of the subject faces complex tasks. She faces such tasks as:

1. A researcher
2. A receiver of knowledge
3. A counselor – helps people to achieve their individual aims
4. A leader – leads as an example and acts impartially
5. A motivator – gingers moral of people for good livelihood
6. A role model – a pace-setter
7. A manager – manages contents, methods, instructional materials, times, resources and so on
8. A planner – dreams and thinks out how to achieve objectives and goals, and many more other activities of individuals, families and societies as they unfold.

All these enlisted constituents are job openings in which ever ways they are seen. Thus, home economics is an employment generation profession in all senses. A home economist is versatile in ample jobs and is even an employer of labour in many respects. This makes him a unique asset and an ardent contributor to national development.

### **Some Problems of Home Economics**

Home economics is a relatively young profession. Nosow (1964), pinpointed some difficulties of this young discipline. In his view, a profound problem is the rapidly trending changing functions of the family and the society. As interest has shifted to the family within wider frames of reference, there has been a noticeable fragmentation in the profession. For example, the home economist who is a fashion coordinator, may feel she has little in common with the nutritionist who works with low-income families. Many home economists have lost sight of their basic responsibilities for helping individuals improve their homes, families and their

societies at large through integration of its multifarious dynamic approaches.

### **Challenging Issues in Home Economics**

Home economics is a young profession in many respects. It has recently evolved from direct apprenticeship of yester-years of the young ones to broad-based full-fledged professional career for both the young and the old including men and women and boys and girls. Challenges come as a result of changes and there is nothing that is as permanent as change. Human intuition for change has necessitated a lot of challenges for the discipline. As paraphrased by Spafford (1957):

*... challenges result to change. Change does not just happen. It is a continuous process – a part of life itself. To say that we live in a changing world is a truism .... No one would say that the challenge of today's world to home economics is the same as that of 1937 .... Two wars have been fought since then ....*

There have been several challenging issues in home economics within the country, Nigeria and beyond. Some of these challenges include the world that is constantly becoming smaller; exchanges or diffusions of knowledge, development of science and technology; emotional concerns; new patterns of living; curricular, and so on which have necessitated numerous trends of diverse dimensions in the discipline.

### **The World is Constantly becoming Smaller**

Through development in science and technology which brought telecommunication media such as internet and website system services, the world is constantly becoming smaller. New

discoveries and development in communication and transportation facilities make it easier and less expensive for people to get together within the shortest possible time. It is common practice today for business concerns to send employees to other countries to handle their affairs first-hand. Many civic, professional and business organizations hold international meetings regularly. Some national meetings are attended by observers from other nations. These and many more of such trends in home economics pose a lot of challenges to the home economists who have to develop at that rate to match the global phenomena (Hutchinson, 1976).

There is the challenge now for people from one country to study or exchange knowledge with those of other countries. Many of our experienced people are accepting consultancy services in other countries. Some stay there for years identifying themselves with the people and making a lasting impression on the life of people of such countries. Young people, too, especially girls and boys, are accepting jobs far away from homes in foreign lands. The number of people reached by radio, television and movies is constantly increasing. The increase in our knowledge about people and our face-to-face contacts with them represent one of the greatest trending challenges in today's world in relation to home economics as a young profession as well as home makers in their various home making activities.

### **Diffusion of knowledge**

Home economics diffuses knowledge gained from its inter-disciplinary and multi-dimensional modes to improve its benefits to mankind. It draws its cocoon from its ample concatenations of distinct areas to improve the well-being of individuals, stabilize society serenity and emancipate propensities for national development (Lee

& Dressel, 1963). Taking culture as an example, a Nigerian home scientist expert who resides in France would learn to tolerate their table 'd'hote' against his indigenous table habit. She will change from her usual common indigenous hedonic foods like 'ugba' and tapioca sources mixed with stockfish, garden eggs and other ingredients to 'a la carte' and 'a la mode' food styles available in France. She can also introduce her indigenous foods 'akpu' or 'fofo' (cassava food) with 'ofe' Owerre (Owerri soup), 'ofe onugbu' (bitter leave soup), and such others to the foreigners in their land which is culture diffusion. These developments take place both in language, clothing and some other ways of life. It is a trending issue which passes such trend effects to any human race the knowledge is new.

### **Development of Science and Technology**

Another great challenging issue in home economics is the rapid development of science and technology. There have been improvements in the materials and methods for use of utensils for modern homes. For example, with electricity, blender, television, washing machine, electric iron and numerous other appliances, are used to make human living simpler and more comfortable. As a result, life span has lengthened. Fewer hours are required to earn a living. People have more free time. The variety and number of labour and time-saving devices or equipment are legion. The pressure to buy and to keep up with the neighbors is hard to withstand. All these and many more are trending issues which pose formidable challenges to modern home makers and their home economics profession (Lee, et al, 1963)

### **Emotional Concerns**

Another area of challenging issues in home economics is the overriding tension for individuals as well as nations. The number

of broken homes, the number of immature adults and many others, are rapidly increasing. The effects of all these on children; the wastes in human resources; the unhappiness they cause; the cost values in money, are beyond our ability to comprehend. These require immediate and tacit tackling with the broader perspectives of knowledge gained from home economics as an inter-disciplinary and multi-faceted profession (Lee, et al, 1963).

### **New Patterns of Living**

Today's world sets a new pattern of living for many people. There is increase in population; families move because of better opportunities for work, a better climate or any one of a dozen reasons. More women are at work working outside their homes, and so on. These pose a great challenge to home economists who require broader spectrum of their professional knowledge to cope with these trending challenging issues (Loftis, 1971).

### **Curricular**

Home economics general objectives curriculum is unknown and unwritten in the curriculum document (Federal Ministry of Education, 1985). So also are the guidelines for implementing the subject. The outlook of home economics courses is seemingly the same thing both at primary school level, junior and senior secondary school levels. There is nothing like pre-vocational syllabus. The syllabus also has a few cases of repetitions of topics. The major shortcomings of the syllabus, however, are not pleasing unlike the ones of other older disciplines which have pre-vocational subjects at junior secondary school and vocational at senior secondary levels, and thus, enhance the study and mastery of the discipline from grassroots (Agwasim & Yaroson, 1995). There is, therefore, the need for inclusion of home economics curricular in all aspects of training in the

profession beginning from crèche through the advanced stage of tertiary level. This will acquit a home economist with grass root knowledge of home economics so as to be able to face the challenges posed by trends of the changing globe. The irregular curricular at tertiary level which dichotomize home economics pedagogy should also be effectively and efficiently tackled in order to create harmony in the systems for proper development of the discipline. The distinction in curricular which dichotomizes higher national diploma and degree holders should be addressed.

Despite all these trending challenges, home economics generates employment to the highest magnitude for the citizenry. All its courses are professional – they are vocations and careers. Home economists train and employ people in their own industries as entrepreneurs. They are also trained to work in government and private establishments, and run consultancy services for multi-national organizations in all aspects of their profession globally.

### **Conclusion**

The need for integration of home economics experts in the developing and developed nations of the world is unarguably desirable. The development of science and technology is rapidly continuing and their trend effects in home economics are widening and very rapidly too with time. Specialists from other countries of the world would benefit from international study of home economics through enhancing exchange of inter-cultural knowledge of professionalism in this field.

It is, therefore, a strong belief that the trends in home economics will continue to broaden the horizon of the discipline professionally and academically by incorporating more elements of other

related disciplines and expanding its inter-disciplinary, multi-faceted and cross-cultural approaches to knowledge. With sufficiently trained professionals to cope, the young area of study would ardently become one of the noblest professions of the world having ardent relationships with and embodying the ever advancing and constantly widening vistas of knowledge of science and technology, arts and the humanities at large.

### **Recommendations**

The Ministry of Education should ensure harmony of curricular of home economics in all facets. It should be appropriately streamed from crèche through tertiary levels in order that the discipline will have no hitches to advance its numerous vocational and career skills for the benefits of humanity and society from the grassroots.

Home economists should intensify researches in the discipline to enable them reasonably improve and integrate all its multiple branches well for greater benefits to mankind and society through national development.

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