

Original Research Report



Strategies towards Enhancing Students' Skill Acquisition through Foods and Nutrition Practicals in Tertiary Institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study on strategies towards enhancing students' skill acquisition through foods and nutrition practicals in tertiary institutions in Anambra State examined the challenges facing effective Foods and Nutrition Practical lessons in tertiary institutions in the State. It also identified strategies that will help the students to gain more skills through balanced practical lessons on foods and nutrition. The study adapted a descriptive research design. The study raised two research questions for guidance; population comprised 38 Foods and Nutrition lecturers and 263 students making a total of 301 persons. Through a Simple random sampling, 147 respondents made up of 35 lecturers and 112 final year students of Home Economics were selected. A Structured questionnaire was used in data collecting and arithmetic mean was used for analysis of data. Challenges militating against effective practical lessons include inadequate time allocation, lack of interest, dearth of qualified teachers and supervisors among others. Strategies such as use of proper teaching methods, subsidizing the cost of practical lessons, exposing students to seminars, conferences and field trips were also identified as ways of tackling the identified challenges. Based on the findings, the study recommended that government and well-meaning individuals should help to equip laboratories with equipment and facilities in tune with times and needs. It is also recommended that Foods and Nutrition practicals should be handles by qualified teachers and resource persons.

Keywords: Enhancement, Foods and Nutrition, Practical Lessons, Skill Acquisition, Strategies

1. Introduction

Home Economics as a course of study takes interest in the improvement of the quality of life of individuals, families and societies. It is focused on the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences needed for meaningful living. Home Economics can enhance the quality of life of individuals and families by equipping them with means (skills) to provide for themselves and by offering them goods and services (Chua, 2018). Foods and Nutrition is an aspect of Home Economics which deals with the principles of food, nutrition, meal management and food security. It is a practical oriented area which is taught using varieties of learner-centered methods of teaching such as demonstration, discovery, drill and practice, field trip among others.

Practical lessons equip recipients with skills, competences and knowledge required for producing different items ranging from food products to house hold cleaning agents to crafts, cosmetics, jewelries and other fashion accessories. Skill acquisition is the process of organizing effective and relevant knowledge in building up aptitude and ability in a particular craft. It entails the development of novel skills, ideas, practice or a way of doing things which is attained by constant practicing. As stated by Isaac (2011) skill acquisition is one among other policies embarked upon by the federal government of Nigeria with the sole aim of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by creating employment opportunities and wealth whilst instilling self-sufficiency and economic reliance. Skill is most of the time mastered through practice as Oniyama and Aroroma (2008) pointed out. For this, Ezenwanne (2021) also implied that skill acquisition through Foods and Nutrition practicals are meant to equip students with more practical and less theoretical knowledge on income generating skills by stating that although problem solving is better than lecture method, demonstration method proves to be the best in teaching entrepreneurial skills.

Acquisition of relevant skills and competence is a panacea in the fight against economic hardships and unemployment in Nigeria as this will curtail crime rates through effective engagement of the youth in meaningful economic activities. This is to say that possession of relevant skills in an antidote to social problems. However, some anti-skill impartation and acquisition factors inherent in the individual, systems, curriculum and society have led to the production of half-baked, skill-deficient graduates who can barely qualify for any job (Usen & Usioboh, 2019). The importance of skill acquisition cannot be over emphasized as Adebisi, Adeshola and Gbadebo (2017) listed some of them to include self-sufficiency and reliability, diverse job opportunities, and wealth creation.

Previous studies carried out by scholars such as Anerua and Obiazi (2012) and Uwameiye (2019) have identified causes of poor skill impartations through practical lessons to include insufficient time allocation to practical lesson. Both researchers believe that if sufficient time is allocated to practicals, it will go a long way to promote in depth competency in skill acquisition since teachers will have time to patiently take students through the lesson using correct methods. Uwameiye (2019) further identified that these problem that weaken the urge to carry out problem solving practical lessons can be surmounted if Home Economics can adopt a unique curriculum which will inculcate the needs of today.

John (2015) believes that poor improvisation of learning materials is another challenge affecting practical lessons, for instance, equipment for bakery can be improvised by some teachers. In cake baking, some teachers make use of improvised oven instead of using the standard oven, however, when there are some technical errors, proper measurements of time and temperature cannot be achieved and this affects the standard and quality of the products as well as deny students the opportunity to learn the proper use of the equipments. Demonstration and experimental methods are

not always used during teaching and this sometimes led to improper teaching methods. Poor finance is another challenge encountered by Home Economic students in some tertiary institutions especially Foods and Nutrition students as students sometimes find very difficult to provide the funds for the basic practical requirement in participation in the Home Economics career making improvisation a necessity. Dearth of qualified teachers is another issue affecting the acquisition of practical skills in Home Economics. Qualified teachers are insufficient and this leads to excessive work and lower the zeal to conduct practical lessons in Foods and Nutrition in most tertiary institutions. All these consequently result in the students' inability to acquire skills thereby hindering the attainment of the main objective of Home Economics Education which is to equip the learner with skills and competencies to be gainfully employed and become self-reliant. Some graduates of Home Economics often remain jobless after study completion because they had poor knowledge of the skills needed to be gainfully employed.

The acquisition of practical skills involves learning new techniques towards expectation of a quality result; for this reason, Oniyama and Amoroma (2008) stated that "learning is a progressive and orderly change in behaviour which comes as a result of experience and exercise". They further asserted that learning is gained through practice or training and experiences that must result in change in behavior which should be relatively permanent". To impact these skills and competences, various methods of instruction such as lecture, demonstration, brainstorming, discussion, individualized discussions, drill and practice, discovery, problem solving, role playing, project, assignment, field trip and exploration are used. Foods and Nutrition as a practical oriented course should be taught with almost all the methods of teaching listed above especially the drill and practice and demonstration methods. These are methods which comprise of description, modeling, explanations as well as practice.

According to Oniyama and Amoroma (2008), "drill and practice is a learner-centered method of teaching in which the learners are expected to be involved with the practice to develop skills as it participate in the lessons until he masters a particular skill". This can be done by exposing the students to practical lessons simultaneously with the theoretical principles. Mkpughe (2009) in Olumati (2021) opined that one of the purposes of teaching through practical experience is to be directly involved in practicing theoretical knowledge thereby increasing the mastery of knowledge acquired (bridging the gap between theory and practice). To buttress this fact, Ogori and Utim (2013) stated that integrating acquisition of self reliance skill into Foods and Nutrition curriculum will help students to engage in productive and useful activities upon graduation. Essentially, skill is the capacity to do something well, usually acquired or learned. It trains a learner on a particular function or task till one expertise is achieved. According to Development Education Centre (2010) skill is very important in life of every human being. Many technicians today earn more than university graduates because the technicians acquired more practical skills than the theories, unlike the graduates who were fed more theoretical knowledge than skills whilst in school.

In Foods and Nutrition practicals, skill acquisition is the ability to effectively analyze and apply the scientific knowledge of nutrition and hygiene in order to promote and aid health. The acquisition of skills in regards to Foods and Nutrition practical means the ability to use food nutrients, fuel and other resources in the planning and preparation of balanced meals. In fact, it is the development of skills and expertise in the preparation and cooking of food. Clearly, Foods and Nutrition practical is more than just cooking and eating; special attention is placed on the quantities and mixtures of ingredients as well as the effects of heat on the foods, the timing, general safety,

precautions and hygiene.

Apparently, through Foods and Nutrition practicals, certain skills can be acquired. Ode (2012) explains that acquisition of skills through Foods and Nutrition helps its recipient to convert raw food materials and other farm products into edible, tasty and palatable dishes. It also enables its recipients to learn how to fortify and enrich foods in order to improve their nutritional composition. For this, John (2015) asserts that students that are adequately exposed to Foods and Nutrition practicals in school will be able to stand their grounds in skills and competences which will help them uphold a sustainable living test. Without practicals, adequate experience and skills, Foods and Nutrition will be difficult to attain.

1.1. Statement of Problem

Home Economics is a programme packed with numerous reliable and employable job opportunities and most of them self-reliant jobs. It is therefore pitiful that many of its graduates still roam the streets in search of employments that are nowhere to be found owing to lack of saleable skills. Currently, Nigeria has an unemployment rate of 9.97% as stated by the National Bureau of Statistics (2021). The problem worsens daily, leading some potential graduates to commit common crimes, roaming around the streets, some on the road seeking unrealistic job and even some depending on their parents' income. The known fact is that there are supposed to be abundant career opportunities open to a Home economics graduate. However, this is not the case as most of them lack skills required to set up their own businesses. Many researchers have identified some factors attributing to this challenge to include inability of most teachers in Home Economics to demonstrate effective practical techniques during teaching and learning, the unavailability of modern equipment and facilities for practical work, dearth of qualified teachers, over improvisation, poor supervision as well as unsuccessful acquisition of skills by graduates, these has been a great hindrance in some tertiary institutions towards the effective delivery of the subject. These problems need special and immediate attention in order to enhance student's acquisition and sustenance of knowledge, skills and self concept formations as well as interest. Many unemployed graduates with good mindset have the initiative to start new ventures but lack the skills, tools and support to succeed because they were being taught more of theories than practical while in school, which clearly explains the reasons why students find it very difficult to practice what is taught. That is the major reason why most tertiary institutions produce students who are ill-equipped with practical skills.

Foods and Nutrition as one of the main components of Home Economics caters for one of the three basic necessities of human needs which is foods, therefore, the value cannot be neglected anywhere in the world. However, due to poor skill acquisition, unemployment still rules amongst graduates of Home Economics. With regards to this condition, there is a need for improvement in practical lessons to enable them become self-reliant. These issues have therefore necessitated the need to examine the strategies towards enhancing skill acquisition through Foods and Nutrition practicals in tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study was to identify strategies towards enhancing students' skill acquisition through Foods and Nutrition practical's in tertiary institutions in Anambra State. Specifically, the study intends to:

- (a) Find out the challenges that hinder effective acquisition of Foods and Nutrition skills by

students in tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

- (b) Identify the strategies that can help students acquire effectively the skills of Foods and Nutrition that can help them develop individually.

1.3. Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:

- (a) What are the challenges that hinder effective acquisition of Foods and Nutrition skills in tertiary institutions in Anambra State?
- (b) What are the strategies that can help students acquire effectively the skills in Foods and Nutrition that can help them develop individually?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Design for the Study

The study adopted a descriptive survey design.

2.1.1. Ethics Statement

The research was carried out bearing in mind and working towards the best interest of the society and all persons involved. The respondents were made clearly aware of the reasons for the study and their sincere responses without any form of deception or coercion. All data used are obtained through the freewill cooperation of respondents and all literature assessed are duly cited.

2.2. Area of the Study

The research study was carried out in tertiary institutions in Anambra State, specifically in those ones where Home Economics and other food related courses are offered namely; Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Federal College of Education Technical, Umunze, and Federal Polytechnic, Oko.

2.3. Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of nine (9) lecturers and thirty three (33) students from the department of Home Economics in NwaforOrizu College Of Education Nsugbe, twelve (12) lecturers and fifty (50) students from the department of Home Economics in Federal College Of Education, Technical Umunze and seventeen (17) lecturers and one hundred and eighty (180) students from Food Technology department of Federal Polytechnic Oko which sum up to thirty eight (38) lecturers and two hundred and sixty three (263) undergraduate students from the aforementioned institutions which is total of three hundred and one (301). A simple random sampling technique was used to select thirty-five lecturers and one hundred and twelve (112) final year students from Home Economics from the aforementioned tertiary institutions. The sample summed up to 147 respondents. One of the tertiary institutions offering Home Economics in Anambra state was not included in the study as they have only lecturers and no students yet.

Table 1: Schools and Number of Lecturers and Students

S/N	Name of Schools	No of Final Year Students	No of Lecturers
1.	Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe	12	9
2.	Federal College of Education Technical, Umunze	20	12

3. Federal Polytechnic Oko	80	14
Total	112	35
<i>Grand Total</i>	147	

2.4. Instrument for Data Collection and Study Procedure

The instrument used for collecting data in this study was a structured questionnaire titled Strategies towards Enhancing Students Skill Acquisition through Foods and Nutrition Practicals (STESSATFNP)

To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, the researchers employed test – retest method of reliability testing. The researchers administered the questionnaire to a selected group of twenty (20) Non-final students in the Department of Home Economics, Federal College of Education, Technical, Umuze the first time, and after the interval of two weeks the same questionnaire was reshuffled and was re-administered to the same group and later the test results were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation which yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.79 indicating a positive reliability.

2.5. Data Collection Technique

The researchers visited the selected tertiary institutions and administered the questionnaire face to face to the respondents with an introductory letter. One hundred and forty seven (147) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the recipient.

2.6. Data Analysis Technique

For the analysis of data, the researchers used descriptive statistical method of analysis. Thus, the researchers computed the score of data collected. The collated data were analyzed using mean.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. *Research question one:* What are the challenges that hinder effective acquisition of Foods and Nutrition skills in tertiary institutions in Anambra State?

Table 2: Mean response on the challenges that hinders effective acquisition of Foods and Nutrition skills by students in tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	Decisions
1.	Laboratory equipment are not adequate for Foods and Nutrition practical	129	16	2	0	3.9	Agree
2.	Obsolete equipment and facilities	97	30	19	1	3.5	Agree
3.	Students find it difficult to provide the funds required for practical	135	12	0	0	3.9	Agree
4.	Most students are lazy and unwilling to work	115	29	3	0	3.8	Agree
5.	Wrong placement during admission can be a problem	107	33	7	0	3.7	Agree
6.	Low cooperation among students in group work	88	49	8	2	3.5	Agree
7.	There is little or no professional supervision during Foods and Nutrition practical	94	52	1	3	3.6	Agree
8.	Teachers do not use demonstration during practical lesson	107	28	10	12	3.6	Agree



9.	Experienced teachers do not handle most practicals	112	29	4	2	3.7	Agree
10.	The time allocated for practical lesson is insufficient	103	34	9	1	3.6	Agree
11.	Lack of funds and infrastructure	120	20	6	1	3.8	Agree
	Grand Mean					3.69	Agree

From table 2, the mean response of the items showed that from item 1 to 11 with their mean responses above 2.5 respectively were all accepted. This implies that the challenges listed above hindered effective skill acquisition through food and nutrition practical. The grand mean of 3.69 indicates that the items are agreed with.

3.2. *Research question two:* What are the strategies that can help students acquire skills effectively in Food and Nutrition practical's in tertiary institutions in Anambra State?

Table 3: Mean responses on the strategies that can help students acquire skills effectively in Food and Nutrition practical's in tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	Decisions
1.	Individualized instruction should be interspersed with group participation	98	37	12	0	3.6	Agree
2.	Salable and employable skills like how to bake and decorate cake and other craft should be emphasized during practicals	82	65	0	0	3.6	Agree
3.	The institution should provide the equipment, tools and materials for food practicals	97	32	13	5	3.5	Agree
4.	Qualified lecturers and resources persons should handle food practicals	115	27	5	0	3.7	Agree
5.	Government should provide funds for practicals	130	12	1	4	3.8	Agree
6.	Teachers need constant retraining to keep them up with technology	74	50	16	7	3.3	Agree
7.	Demonstration of each skill should be carried out to build competency	86	46	11	4	3.4	Agree
8.	Students can have a catering or Food exhibition to show case their skills before they graduate	91	47	9	0	3.6	Agree
9.	Students should attend seminars, workshops and conferences aimed at skill demonstrations before leaving school	89	49	8	1	3.5	Agree
10.	Lecturers and management can reduce cost of practical lessons on students by limiting the quantities of ingredients to just what is needed for the study alone	43	94	6	4	3.5	Agree
11.	Government should initiate a loan	53	91	3	1	3.6	Agree

scheme for students in Foods and Nutrition programmes where they can assess some financial assistance towards establishing a small scale enterprise on graduation

Grand mean

3.54 Agree

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From Table 3, it shows that all the items has their mean responses above 2.5 were accepted from the analysis. It shows that these strategies listed above can be used to help students acquire skill effectively in Food and Nutrition practical's in tertiary institution in Anambra State. A grand mean of 3.54 was obtained and accepted.

The study identified eleven challenges hindering effective skill acquisition through Foods and Nutrition practicals which include; obsolete equipment and facilities, insufficient time allocation, dearth of qualified teachers among others. The findings on the challenges that hinders effective acquisition of Foods and Nutrition skills by students showed that student face numerous challenges during Foods and Nutrition practicals which include, inadequate equipment in schools, obsolete equipment and facilities among others. This agrees with. Usen and Usioboh (2019) that “most tertiary institutions have obsolete practical equipment making it practically impossible for teachers to effectively impact skills to the students”. Another problem is that adequate time is not allocated for food practical. In supporting the view, Lemchi (2012) also advocated that “sufficient time should be allocated to practical or skills acquisition classes to enable teachers cover the syllabus, encourage full demonstration and improve on learner's creative skills.”

The personnel to assist students in laboratory work during Food practicals are not adequate. In many tertiary institutions where Foods and Nutrition laboratories are available, laboratory assistants are not available or those available are not effective due to poor training. Mbanusi (2008) viewed the schools with an outstanding Foods and Nutrition programme is likely to be properly equipped and have adequate staff so that the task of management may not be left entirely on the hands of one teacher or few unqualified technicians. This means that for an effective Foods and Nutrition practicals to take place there should be adequate personnel who have the necessary competence for the practical course. Similarly, Molokwu (2018) identified lack of funds for Home Economics skill acquisition classes and attributed this to be the problem of poor public image, lack of legislation and political participation in the Home Economics career.

The study identified eleven strategies towards enhancing students' skill acquisition in Foods and Nutrition practical's which include; organizing relevant seminars and workshops for students and lecturers, applying an individual instruction method, reducing the cost of practical lessons among others. The findings revealed the need for qualified teachers and resource persons to handle food practicals. It agrees with Allen (2015) findings that lecturers who teach practicals should be well grounded in the theory, practical and above all must be dedicated, consistent, visionary, motivating and patience. Conferences and seminars are very important for teachers to be current in the field. This is because our education is not static; the system of education is always changing. Practical should be based on salable and employable skills Ogundele (2010) in support of this, noted that “when youths are given adequate training in skills, they can be self-employed after schooling, hence, they become active partners in both community and national development”. Supporting this view, Adebisi, Opaleke, and Unomah, (2015) stated that “employment requirement in most establishments are changing everyday due to technological impact as such, an educational system has a daunting

task to equip consumers of education with the required marketable skills”. Consequently, the possession of skill is important in stopping graduates from becoming social misfits. “An ideal graduate should contribute to the growth of the nation rather than direct his educational potentials and strength to committing crime and other vices” (Usen & Usioboh, 2019). The institutions should provide the equipment, tools and other materials for Food practicals. Ukpore (2011) noted that the availability of facilities makes teachers to attend to individual students needs and engage students in problem solving tasks to enable them acquire required skills and techniques in Foods and Nutrition.

Based on its findings, the study highlighted the need for qualified, current and innovative teachers in the teaching and learning of Foods and Nutrition. It also charged the government and educational planners to see the need to restructure the educational system to suit and accommodate the current societal needs in teaching and learning especially in Foods and Nutrition practicals in tertiary institutions. In the course of this research work, the authors encounter some challenges in terms of time and financial constraints, inconveniences arising from traveling to and fro the study area, difficulties encountered in convincing the respondents of assured privacy, among others. These challenges affected the speed and coverage of the work but were carefully managed so they did not affect the authenticity of the findings of the study. The researchers recommend that a replication of this study be carried out in other study areas on strategies towards enhancing skill acquisition through clothing and textile practicals in tertiary institutions as well as the role of home economics in ameliorating the unemployment issues in South-East Nigeria.

4. Conclusion

The study investigated the strategies towards enhancing students’ skill acquisition through Foods and Nutrition practicals in tertiary institutions in Anambra State. Various factors have been identified as major hindrances to the smooth flow of teaching and learning activities during Foods and Nutrition practical lessons. Chief among these are the unavailability of resource such as equipment and facilities used during practical lessons. The Foods and Nutrition laboratories are not well-equipped to promote learning and some of the equipment have become outdated and no longer functional. This causes set back during practicals, lack of the financial resources has resulted in most teachers conducting more theory lessons at the expense of the practicals thereby creating a barrier between theory and practical components. Aside from this the human resources is insufficient as some teachers and instructors have become obsolete in knowledge. The study has therefore tried to address these ailments in order to help the learners understand themselves, acquire skills and develop competency in needed for self and societal improvements. The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study: Students should be exposed sufficiently to Food practical lessons in order to ensure that they acquire adequate skills that could make them self-reliant. There is need for re-orientation of students to ensure proper values. Students should be encouraged to go on excursion (field trips) at least once in every session. Government should assist students with funds to subsidize the cost of practicals. Qualified teachers/resource person should handle practical lessons while making use of the proper teaching methods, equipment and facilities. Government and NGOs should organize on-the-job training and retraining for teacher to update them in theory and methods in teaching and learning

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Author Contributions

Ebele Cynthia Emeka, Dorothy Nkem Ezenwanne and Amara Rita Ezekwem made substantial contributions to the work in areas of topic conception, research design, data collection and analysis and critical assessment of the whole work, proofreading and offering recommendations. All authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of this work and approved the final version.

Data Availability Statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article. Further enquiries can be directed to the corresponding author

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