

ENHANCING PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES IN HOME ECONOMICS EDUCATION TOWARDS SELF-RELIANCE: FOOD AND NUTRITION IN FOCUS

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Abstract

The study focused on practical experiences in food and nutrition, its importance, how it can guarantee self-reliance and innovative approaches for enhancing these practical experiences for self-reliance. Three (3) research questions and three (3) purpose of study were formulated to guide the research work. Descriptive research method was adopted; the target population consisted of all NCE Home Economics students in Federal College of Education FCE (T)Omoku, in the 2018/2019 academic year. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Data were analyzed using mean. Results revealed among others that practical experiences help to bridge the gap between theory and practice and can also help students identify career opportunities in Food and Nutrition. Based on the findings, the study recommended that students should be given opportunity for self-practice so as to gain mastery and improve on what was taught for self-reliance. Emphasis should be laid on practical classes in curriculum planning to equip the Food and Nutrition graduates enter occupations suited to their abilities and offering reasonable opportunities for personal growth and social usefulness.

Key Words: Practical, Enhancement, Food Nutrition, Self-Reliance.

Introduction

The need for functional education in a developing nation such as Nigeria which has been bedeviled by high unemployment rate of her graduates and school leavers cannot be over emphasized. Unemployment in Africa is a serious economic danger, underemployment is a situation whereby the productive capacity of the employment is not fully utilized or employed at a low – paying job which persons are qualified for (Oviawe, 2010). Education in Nigeria is considered as the most valuable tool for human building. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2004) makes it clear that government recognized education as the greatest investment that the nation can use to bring about

civilization, modernization, development and socio- economic progress. In recognizing this fact, the Federal Government has made substantial investment in education at all levels. Following the adoption of the National Policy of Education (NPE) in 1981 (revised 1998 and 2004). The entire scope and content of Secondary School curriculum was restructured so that both academic and vocational subjects could be studied. Emphasis is focused on vocational subjects to equip the graduates for further studies and to provide employment opportunities (in both public and private sectors) and provide self – employment opportunities (Oviawe, 2010). Technical and Vocation Education is one of the educational programs which prepares its recipients for employment in (TVE) related occupations, self – employment as well as further advancement of educational pursuits.

Home Economics is a Vocational (VTE) course that involves the study of all the elements of family living, individual development and interpersonal relation (Mkpughe, 2009). Home Economics is also seen as a field of knowledge and services concerned, primarily with strengthening family life. It is the field of study that provides the necessary knowledge for guiding and assisting human beings towards a more rewarding and fulfilled life, compatible with the society, within the context of Home management and family life.

The philosophy of Home Economics Education borders on the improvement of the quality of life of the individual family specifically and the society at large. It focuses on the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences which family members require to satisfactorily improve family living. Food and Nutrition is a major area of Home Economics. It comprises of the principles of nutrition, meal management vis-à-vis practical application of the principles. It is a practical oriented aspect of Home Economics. The science of Food and Nutrition cannot be effectively taught without carrying out practical. Learning is the activity one performs and the experience one passes through that affects his/her behavior. (Adebisi, 2012)

Adebisi (2012) posited that learning is a progressive and orderly change in behavior which comes as a result of experience and exercise. They asserted that learning is acquired through practice or training and experiences that must result in change in behavior and such change in behavior should be relatively permanent. To this end, various methods of teaching are employed in teaching, these include; Lecture, Demonstration, Discussion, Individualized and Drill, Discovery, Problem solving, Role playing, Project, Assignment, Field trip and Mode to develop creativity. Food and

Nutrition Classes can teach the latest research in Nutrition and food safety. This is a constantly changing topic as scientists learn and understand more about how the human body works. A Food and Nutrition teacher can then take this knowledge and help the students apply it in their lives, they can teach the proper ways to select, prepare and cook foods vegetables, learning the different cuts of meat and how to prepare them cannot only improve health but can help keep the budget in check as well.

Idialu & Okogbenin (2010), see Food and Nutrition as a major area of Home Economics; which is a practically oriented. Skill can be acquired in Food and Nutrition when students are given the opportunity to practice what they are taught. Adequate practice will equip the students with relevant skills and knowledge for gainful employment and self – reliance; Idialu & Okogbenin further stated that the acquisition of such skills can become relevant to businesses and self – employment, if the skills are integrated in with entrepreneurial skills. Supporting this Olaitan, (2001) in an earlier study stated that Food and Nutrition is a skill oriented course, possessing the capability of equipping individuals with saleable skills that make for self-employment as well as helping individuals to attain and live a useful and satisfying life. Therefore, Food and Nutrition has the responsibility of improving the quality of life of individuals and families through job creation and promoting self-reliance through practical experiences. This can be done by exposing students to practical lessons simultaneously with the theoretical principles. The need for enhancing practical experiences in Food and Nutrition therefore cannot be over stressed.

Mkpughe, (2009) outlined the purposes of teaching through practical experiences thus:

- Providing chances for students to be directly involved in practicing theoretical knowledge thereby increasing the mastery of knowledge acquired (Bridging the gap between theory and practice)
- Enabling students to develop imaginative thinking that can enhance their creative potentials
- Exposing students to a wide variety of equipment and processes that can enable them to discover relevant new ideas (innovation) and techniques.
- Assisting recipients to exploit locally available resources and utilize them – to meet developmental needs of the nation, enabling teachers to access students’ abilities and determine areas of correction and reinforcements.

Others key learning aims of practical classes are:

- To consolidate subject knowledge: learn about theoretical materials not included in lectures.
- Introduce disciplinary method and procedures: Appreciate the methods and ethos of practitioners in a discipline and thus contribute to the shaping of professional attitudes.
- develop technical skills
- Promote team work skills: work in groups which can lead to an appreciation of the value of working with others (as an entrepreneur).
- Increase motivation: work with other students which can lead to a greater motivation towards an interest in the subject and the profession (University of Leicester, 2015).

Entrepreneurial skills in Food and Nutrition require quality specification, creativity and new product development. The need for consistency in quality is very important in Food and Nutrition business. Peter & Ian (2001) viewed Food Quality in different dimensions as;

- Freedom from germs. The food health scares of the last ten years have alerted consumers to the presence of micro-organisms causing food poisoning, tuberculosis and a number of other diseases.
- Low additives from food manufactures and residual contaminants from farming.
- Food that has been sustainably produced, for instance from organic farming without negative environmental side effects.
- From source that can be trusted. Important here is knowledge about the origins of the food, through certification/labelling or even purchase directly from the producer.
- Knowledge of the constituents (fats, sugar, salt etc) and preparation, allowing the food to be consumed as part of a balanced diet.
- Miscellaneous qualitative aspects that imply quality, fresh, exotic, luxurious, expensive, highly refined, traditional.

Hence, the need for an enhanced practical teaching experience in Food and Nutrition for self-reliance.

Idialu & Okogbeni (2010), see Food and Nutrition as it relates to small scale businesses include: Bread Making, Cake Making, Production of Starch, Garri, Yam and Plantain Flour Processing, Bottling of groundnut and spices, Manufacturing of biscuits

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and chin – chin, marketing of raw food crops, operation of snack shops, marketing of fruit/drinks, fruit juice making, ice cream, yoghurt and establishment of fast food restaurants, vegetables and fruit growing and selling, Hotel Management, Marketing of Popcorn, Akara and Moi-moi. Others include; production of beverages, poultry keeping, cafeteria Management, Street Food Vending, Outdoor catering, Catering School Operations Services, Soya Milk Processing, Nutrition / Diet Counseling and Indoor Catering.

On a large scale, the major aim of Food and Nutrition is all about hospitality. The hospitality industry is growing all the time, it provides excellent, opportunities for training and employment to a graduate. In this area individuals can manage, operate and employ others in the following areas:

- Bakery and bakery shops
- Food processing and preservations
- Preparation of condiments, seasonings and flavorings for sale.
- Management of Hotels and Catering guest house, franchising.
- Management of club houses and mess
- Management of institutional guest house
- Professional dietician consultants. (Foskett, Cesarani and Campbell, (2009); Onyeukwu, Agbe and Pepple (2010).

In Food and Nutrition, the entrepreneur should be able to operate in clean environment and present his/her product in a safe manner, she should be able to advertise and provide correct information and labeling: for instance, in cake making, she/he should be able to decorate, present and interpret ingredients used and package the cake attractively. She/he should be able to exhibit the skills involved in the processing of soya bean into soya milk and develop the ability to convince consumers that soya milk is richer than other milk products. In poultry keeping, an entrepreneur should have the ability to plan, source for fund, select good breeds, prepare good space for them, provide adequate feeding that contain balanced nutrition, take proper care to prevent them from dying, sell them more profitably and take proper record of breeds and profit made. Idialu & Okobgeni (2010) opined that poor record keeping can lead to business failure and the only way students can be equipped with these skills it through practical demonstration.

Food and Nutrition is an essential part of Home Economics as a Vocational Subject, the aim of teaching Home Economic in school is to teach learners how to use

available resources in their environment to improve themselves and their home, families and Society life (Anyakoha, 2007), for Food and Nutrition to help achieve this aim there is need to enhance practical experiences in schools especially at the tertiary institutions. Some Innovative approaches to enhancing Practical Teaching in Home Economics (Food and Nutrition) as stated that by Dada (2007); Inyama, (2008); Ogu, (2008); Mkpughe, (2009) and Zhang, (2015) includes: improvisation, use of real objects, Lectures from Resource Persons, Demonstrations, Institutional Catering Services, field trip and Excursions to Resources Centers, Exhibition, Adequate finding of practical, Provision of Adequate Facilities, Regular Accreditation and re-accreditation of the subject in schools to be carried out by examining bodies to serve as quality assurance, Adopting Multi – media assisted Teaching Methods and Onsite Practical, Curriculum Innovation, Updating knowledge about Food and Nutrition, Improving teaching Method and Teaching Means.

Most graduates of Food and Nutrition still go about looking for employment and white collar jobs. This paper therefore examines the need for enhanced practical experiences to ensure self-reliance after graduation from tertiary institutions.

Practical Work is a key factor in engaging, enthusing and inspiring students, thus stimulating lifelong interest in Home Economics courses especially Food and Nutrition. High quality, appropriate practical work is central to effective learning in Food and Nutrition, where practical is excellent; the standard of students' skills will be generally high, leading to self-confidence and an aspiration to go into more profitable ventures. The problem of the present study therefore is to find out ways of enhancing these practical experiences in Food and Nutrition towards self-reliance before and after graduation. Therefore, to carry out this study the following purpose of study and research questions were formulated to guide the study.

Purpose of the study

The major purpose of this study was to determine the innovative approaches or strategies to enhance practical experiences in Home Economics for self-reliance with Food and Nutrition in focus. Specifically, the study sought to:

- Identify the importance of practical experiences (classes) in teaching Food and Nutrition.
- Determine how practical experiences in Food and Nutrition can guarantee self-reliance to graduates (as entrepreneurs).

- Identify some innovative approaches/strategies for enhancing practical experiences in Food and Nutrition.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- What is the importance of practical classes in teaching Food and Nutrition?
- How can practical experiences in Food and Nutrition guarantee self-reliance for graduates?
- What are the innovative approaches/strategies to enhance practical experience in Food and Nutrition?

Methodology

Area and Design of the Study

Survey research method was used and the study adopted ex post-facto research design. The area of the study was Omoku, Rivers State.

Population of the study

The target population for this study was made up of all Nigerian Certificates in Education (NCE) Students in the Department of Home Economics in Federal College of Education (Tech) Omoku in the 2018/2019 academic year. The population of the students was 106 as at the time of the study. There was no sampling as the entire population was used for the study.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for this study was a structured questionnaire, designed on a 4 points scale of strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed. The questionnaire consisted of twenty three (23) items separated into three (3) sections of 7 items for the importance of practical classes, 7 items for how practical experiences can guarantee self-reliance and 9 items for the innovative approaches for enhancing practical experiences in Food and Nutrition.

To ascertain the validity of the questionnaire, the researcher presented the initial draft to two Food and Nutrition experts. They made some corrections that were effected in the production of the final draft of the questionnaire.

Data Collection Techniques

One hundred and six (106) copies of the questionnaires were distributed to the subjects and retrieved after the completion of the questionnaires and used for the study.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using arithmetic mean; a cutoff point of 2.50 was used in answering the research questions. Items with mean ratings up to and above 2.50 were regarded as agree; while items with mean ratings below 2.50 were regarded as disagree.

Findings of the Study

The following findings were made:

Table 1: Mean of the respondents on importance of Practical Experiences in Food and Nutrition.

S/No.	Importance of Practical Classes	\bar{X}	Decision
1)	Provides chances for students to be directly involved in practicing theoretical knowledge (Bridging the gap between theory and practice)	3.34	Agree
2)	Enables students develop imaginative thinking that can enhance their creativity	3.51	Agree
3)	Exposes students to a wide variety of equipment's and processes that can enable them discover relevant new ideas (Innovation)	3.78	Agree
4)	Assist recipients to explore locally available resources and utilize them.	3.09	Agree
5)	Increases motivation to study and learn by doing.	3.75	Agree
6)	Introduces disciplinary method and procedures that will help shape professional attitudes.	3.15	Agree
7)	Promotes teamwork skills	3.39	Agree
	Grand mean Score	3.34	Agree

Data in table I revealed that the entire item had a mean score above the cut-off point of 2.50. Therefore, the subjects agreed that the listed items are some of the importance of practical classes in Food and Nutrition.

Table 2: Mean score of the respondents on how practical experiences can guarantee Self-reliance to graduates, (As entrepreneurs).

S/No.	Practical Experiences and Self Reliance	\bar{X}	Decision
1)	Helps you identify career opportunities in Food and Nutrition.	4.00	Agree
2)	Helps you gain mastery on what is taught with confidence in the skill	3.56	Agree
3)	Able to meet up with other financial challenges and unemployment as an avenue for income generation.	3.09	Agree
4)	Become job givers instead of job seekers	3.33	Agree
5)	Helps you to learn how to co-operate with others	3.42	Agree
6)	Improves your creativity and learn new things	3.33	Agree
7)	Boosts your ego in the Home and society	3.41	Agree
	Grand mean score	3.45	Agree

Table 2 showed that the mean ratings were above 2.50. This indicates that the respondents agreed with the statements that practical experiences can be enhanced for self-reliance after graduation.

Table 3: Mean of the respondents on innovative Approaches for Enhancing Practical Experiences in Food and Nutrition.

S/No.	Innovative approaches for enhancing practical experiences	\bar{X}	Decision
1)	The use of real life objects	3.40	Agree
2)	Improvisation	4.00	Agree
3)	Self-practice aimed at improving what was taught	3.39	Agree
4)	Excursions	3.00	Agree
5)	Adopting multi-media assisted teaching methods and on-site practical	3.15	Agree
6)	Adequate funding of practical	4.00	Agree

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7)	Curriculum innovation, use of resource materials, like books, CDs, nutrition	3.17	Agree
8)	Updating knowledge about food and nutrition	3.59	Agree
9)	Improving teaching methods and teaching means.	4.00	Agree
	Grand mean score	3.52	Agree

Some innovative approaches were highlighted in table 3 above. A quick look at this table indicates that students agreed to that practical application of these innovative approaches could enhance practical experiences in Food and Nutrition for self-reliance because the entire mean score was above the cutoff point.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from research question 1, showed that respondents agreed that the need for practical classes cannot be over emphasized as it provides opportunities for students to be directly involved in practicing theoretical knowledge, enables students to develop imaginative thinking that can enhance their creativity, exposes them to a wide range of variety of equipment and processes. This can enable them discover relevant new ideas, assist recipients to exploit locally available resources and utilize them. Increase motivation to study and learn by doing, introduces disciplinary methods and procedures that will help shape professional attitudes, promote teamwork skills within them and amongst others.

These findings supported Mkpuhe, (2009), that practical in Home Economics helps students to be directly involved in practicing theoretical knowledge, enables students develop imaginative thinking, exposes students to a wide range of equipment's and discover new ones, assist recipients to explore locally available resources, promote teamwork skills and increase motivation.

Findings from research question 2, showed that enhanced practical experiences in Food and Nutrition can guarantee self-reliance as future entrepreneur, as it will help them identify career opportunities in Food and Nutrition, gain mastery on what was taught with confidence in the skill, meet up with other financial challenges as an avenue for income generation, become job givers instead of job seekers, boost their ego in the society and at home. This also confirms the statements of Idialu and Okogbenin (2010) that Food and Nutrition is a major area of Home Economics, and is a practical oriented

aspect of Home Economics where skills can be acquired when students are given the opportunity to practice what is taught. According to them, this adequate practice will equip the students with relevant skills and knowledge for gainful employment and self-reliance. Acquisition of such skills can become relevant to business and self-employment. Supporting this Onyeukwu, Agbe and Pepple (2010) stated that with this practice students can manage, operate businesses like snacks shops, restaurants, Bakeries, food processing and preservation centers, preparation of condiments, seasonings and flavourings in large scale, professional dieticians and food consultants and also employ others thereby improving the economy of the nation.

The last finding of this study indicated that the use of real life objects, improvisation, self-practice, excursions, talks/lectures/seminars, Adequate funding of practicals, curriculum innovation, adopting multi-media assisted teaching methods on-site practicals, updating knowledge about Food and Nutrition, Improving teaching methods and teaching means are innovative approaches or strategies for enhancing practical experiences. This supports Zhang (2015) who stressed that because of the peculiarity of Vocational education, emphasis should be on professional quality education, including code of professional conduct and basic technical skill, teachers should change traditional teaching methods of cuisine, update teaching content and adopt new advanced materials, new designs and new methods in order to improve teaching availability. Such practices will provide students more opportunities for innovation and to arouse students enthusiasm in practical teaching process.

Furthermore, Dada (2007); Ogu (2008); Inyan (2008); and Mkpuhe (2009) also stated that the use of real objects, improvisation, field trips and excursions, adequate funding of practical, regular accreditation and re-accreditation of the subject, by examining bodies are strategies to enhance practical experiences.

Conclusion

It would be timely as part of innovation towards the teaching and learning of Home Economics courses especially Food and Nutrition, that practical experiences be enhanced through these various approaches to ensure self-reliance, this is because Nigeria is battling with the problems of unemployment and poverty and the economy is facing serious challenges despite the rich endowment of both human and material resources.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

- 1) Emphasis should be laid on practical classes in curriculum planning to equip the graduate to enter occupations suited to their abilities and offering reasonable opportunities for personal growth and social usefulness.
- 2) Adequate funding of food and nutrition unit is important as this will help institutions provide the right instructional material and teaching environments such as well-equipped food and nutrition laboratories.
- 3) Students should be given opportunity for self-reliance so as to gain mastery and improve on what was taught for self-reliance.
- 4) Improvisation should be encouraged when particular equipment is not available, this will enable them appreciate the resources around them and utilize them effectively to meet with family needs.

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