

# **LIFE SKILLS-BASED HOME ECONOMICS EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

Life skills based education is a form of education that focuses on cultivating personal life skills such as self- reflection, critical thinking, problem solving and interpersonal skills. Home Economics Education is a pathway to self-sustenance and job creation. Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Therefore, while Home Economics Education provides the pathway by which the individual obtains a formal certificate as is now patronized by many, inclusion of life skills in very practical terms as per each course in the duration of study would present a more desirable and sustainable outcome. Education in Home economics presents the student a variety of self-reliant career options which will help to alleviate numerous societal problems. The curriculum for Home Economics Education at all levels should integrate ideals that would trigger personal analysis, reflective and independent thinking, preferring solutions and social skills. This paper examines ways to integrate life skills in the curriculum of Home Economics education in order to foster sustainable development. Recommendations were given that, areas lacking the skills in the curriculum should be reviewed while also amplifying areas where meaningful attempts are being made.

**Keywords:** Life skills, Home Economics, Development

Life skills based education is a form of education that focuses on cultivating personal life skills such as self- reflection, critical thinking, problem solving and interpersonal skills(WHO, 2017). The term “life skill-based” projects that a life skills approach should be used to teach the subject matter. The life skills approach promotes participatory teaching/learning methods which are encouraged to be adopted to help the students develop not only knowledge but also psycho-social skills they may need to express knowledge acquired (Bart and Michielsen, 2013).Life skills education represents a shift in educational focus from information to methodologies (Shakiya, 2016). Life skills are defined as psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that would enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (Bart and Michielsen 2013).

Home Economics Education is a pathway to self-sustenance and job creation.Home Economics Education promotes understanding daily issues and improving aspects of live that impacts individuals, families and communities; this in turn enables the individual make responsible choices. The *Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary*, (2018) briefly defines Home Economics as a college curriculum usually including studies in nutrition, purchasing, preparation and service of food, interior design, clothing and textiles, child development, family relationships and household economics. The central focus of home economics is the wellbeing of people within the context of their personal, family, community and work roles. It is also about individuals becoming independent, connecting with others and taking actions towards a preferred future that supports individual and family wellbeing. Home economics education has the potential to play a major role in supporting young people to participate effectively in changing social, cultural and economic times (*Journal Gazette*, 2018).It in the light of this that a life skill-based home economics education is advocated for.

Education is the process of transfer of positive skills, values and inclination towards values that are desirable to the society and would bring about self-awareness, self-reorientation and self-reliance (Akarowhe, 2017). Good quality education is an essential tool for achieving a more sustainable world as it is at the heart of human progress (Mintz and Tal 2014).

Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Blewitt, 2015). Sustainable development can be viewed as a process that involves the economic, social and cultural aspects of mankind as well as the environmental health of the earth (Mulder *et al*, 2015).

Since the introduction in 2015 of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, there has been discussions and debates across a range of

professional fields, including the tertiary education sector about how the institutions through the courses they offer can actively contribute to this mandate (United Nations, 2017). Academic institutions have a broad responsibility and role to play to reach the wide ranging SDGs and contribute to sustainable national development. As the 2030 SDG agenda draws closer, it is imperative that the education sector becomes significantly involved in the cause to achieving the SDGs.

To achieve these goals, there is need to acquire new skills, values and attitudes that lead to more sustainable societies (Lundgren, 2016). Education systems must respond to this pressing need by defining relevant learning objectives and learning contents, introducing methods of instruction that empower learners and urging their institutions to include sustainability principles in their management structures (Lundgren, 2016).

Around the world, Life Skills-Based Education is being adopted as a means to empower young people in challenging situations (Bart and Michielsen, 2013). Life skills are essentially those abilities that help promote mental well-being and competence in young people as they face the realities of life. They can be utilized in many content areas such as: prevention of drug use, sexual violence, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS prevention and suicide prevention. The definition extends into consumer education, environmental education, peace education or education for development, livelihood and income generation, among others (Mintz and Tal 2014). Life skills in some exceptional instances are distinguished from occupational skills (Sterling, 2014). It is also a critical element in UNICEF's definition of quality education (Mulder *et al*, 2015). Some countries have stepped up to place work place skill-based learning for youth at the centre of their approach to vocational education. Their key challenge is to ensure that the life-long characteristics of work place learning are reflected in education and skill strategies and policies (Sterling, 2014). Some of their strategies include, developing new approaches for validation of non-formal and informal learning and enabling flexible access to skills development and qualifications (Mulder *et al*, 2015).

In the United States, specific academic programmes on sustainability built around life skills based education can be found in 46% of the top 100 Undergraduate programmes (*Journal Gazette*, 2018). The students have a wide variety of educational experiences across other disciplines as well and are better equipped with practical skills and knowledge needed to excel in business (Hoffman, 2018).

In Lesotho, life skill based education was introduced in 2008 from primary to tertiary education level and has been adopted with the aim to equip learners with skills in an attempt to promote acceptable attitudes and behaviors. The process is carried out by ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through

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equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes; and improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (Koloso and Makhakhane, 2015).

Findings of study carried out in India by Shakiya, 2016 showed that life skills education can be beneficial in targeting negative behaviors in children and encouraging sound values and actions.

The government of Kenya introduced the teaching of life skills based education in 2008 as a non-examinable subject in schools with the intention to empower students with psychosocial competencies that would help them make informed decisions, solve problems, think creatively and critically and communicate effectively. Even though implementing the program had challenges, there was recorded success in parts of the country where it was successfully implemented (Marwanga and Matheka, 2015).

Specific goals that drive home the necessity for skill based home economics education include;

Goal 1: no poverty

Goal 2: zero hunger

Goal 3: good health and well being

Goal 6: clean water and sanitation

Goal 8: decent work and economic growth

Goal 9: industry, infrastructure and innovation

Goal 12: responsible production and consumption

Goal 13: climate action.

Goal 17: partnership for the goals

To this end, it becomes necessary to convey how Life Skills-Based Home Economics Education, expressed Programmes and Goals can contribute to Sustainable Development. It is in the light of these that this paper will be discussed under the following objectives.

### **Objectives**

The general objective of this paper is to present how Life Skills-Based Home Economics Education can contribute to Sustainable Development.

The specific objectives are to

1. Highlight Life Skills that are relevant to Home Economics Education.
2. Suggest approaches to how these skills can be translated into activities during the period of study.

3. Suggest how the programmes and goals would affect/contribute to sustainable development.

### **Life Skills that are Relevant to Home Economics Education**

There was the perception that home economics had to do with the home but a closer look at the curriculum indicates that the courses offered prepare students for careers (Aliyu, 2001). Present times has witnessed the evolution of the society from having a job waiting for people fresh out of school to an increasing number of unemployed individuals (Dernbach, 1998). However, inspite of the stark reality, a lot of students enrolling into higher institutions place more focus on studying to get good grades without recourse to the components of the programme that might be indispensable. Home Economics Education facilitates the development of knowledge and skills to assist with the development of independent, resourceful consumer citizens capable of making informed decisions and establishing work/life balance. The following skills if reined in together with the existing available study course contents could advance towards sustainable development:

#### **Social skills**

Acquiring social skills is a vital part of mental health (Takahashi *et al.*, 2015). Social skills are acquired behaviors which are based on social rules and empowers an individual to interact appropriately with others in the society. This skill enables human beings to develop healthy social relationship in all life stages (Pecjack *et al.*, 2009). Social skills such as simple conciliation and mediation methods, patience, personal development, attentiveness, intrapersonal interaction, situational awareness, Effective decision making (for self and for groups), problem solving, community mobilization and volunteering would boost better understanding and application of the following subjects: marriage and family relationship, child development and care, personal and community health and hotel and tourism education.

#### **Financial literacy/budgeting lessons**

In recent times, individuals are more responsible for their personal finances than ever before (Aslam and Hasnu, 2016). More individuals are experiencing changes in the labour market. Financial literacy skills are becoming more critical as people are sourcing for diverse means of earning income. Prudent and purposeful spending is a skill that would be invaluable therefore strategies to include this during the study duration should be encouraged. It would be helpful to provide the students with information they need to manage their monies at key points throughout their lives, they should be encouraged to

set financial goals while saving and planning for the future and also promote practices that would protect against risks and contribute to financial well-being. Financial literacy would encourage the understanding application of all the subjects in the course of study as finance is an integral part of every course.

### **Goal setting**

Goal setting starts with identifying short to long term goals. The identified goals need to be defined properly by assigning them some value as well as setting a time view of when to achieve them. There should be clarity concerning the particular goals the student wishes to achieve. Goal setting contributes to better management of an individual's resources and helps to curb impulsive and unnecessary spendings. A study by Salmani, *et al.*, 2013 in Japan showed that students' personal initiatives played a large role in determining how they would act or react in their work environment towards meeting targets. Goal setting which may be classified as short term, medium term and long term as per the set time duration of meeting the target would boost better understanding and application of the following subjects: meal management and planning, pregnancy and child development, consumer education and home management. Application of goal setting is not limited to the following subjects as this skill is very relevant in all ramifications to help the student be organized and stay focused.

### **Time management**

Time management is the process of planning and exercising conscious control often spent on specific activities, especially to increase effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity. Time management refers to managing time effectively so that the right time is allocated to the right activity. Effective time management allows individuals to assign specific time slots to activities as per their importance and this helps to make the best use of time. Time like money, can be made to meet needs and desires, if its expenditures is planned (Shakiya, 2016).

### **Meal Planning/Nutrition**

Meal planning is making a plan of meals with adequate nutrition for every member of the family within the available resources for a specified time. The term 'available resources' implies whatever the family has in terms of time, energy and money. Meal planning involves choosing a menu or a list of foods that will be included in a meal and also implementing the principles of nutrition in an appetizing manner. Purchases of needed ingredients are done based on specified meals on the plan.

### **Child care**

Childcare is when children are supervised and cared for by a person other than a parent or caregiver. It is important that the family and childcare components of home economics are addressed through teaching and learning activities, because students are often in the role of caregivers within their families and they are likely to be future parents. Early childhood experiences form the foundations for the next generation of parents and caregivers. The positive development of young people is fostered when they have a sound base of knowledge about how to meet first their own and then a child's physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs (Laster and Johnson, 2001).

Learning activities involving critical thinking allow students to explore and extend their views on how social and economic circumstances and socio-ecological factors, including recent technologies, may affect people throughout their lives. These activities may also provide opportunities to engage students in the processes of health promotion in various contexts.

### **Health and Hygiene**

Hygiene is the science concerned with the prevention of illness and maintenance of health. It entails an individual's level of cleanliness. Good personal hygiene is very important as it helps an individual to cope with such temporary physical conditions as oily skin, and hair, and increased perspiration. Home economists have often been portrayed as being obsessed with dust and germs and intent on inventing endless busy work for women, but such stereotypes hide the real contributions they made to health and well-being. Skill applicable here involves how to apply simple first aid in the event of an emergency and never to leave an open wound untreated.

Hygiene also covers food safety which is the prevention of harmful microorganisms from growing in food while also ensuring the cleanliness of the environment where the preparation is carried out. Food hygiene are the conditions and measures necessary to ensure the safety of food from production to consumption and the storage as well (Shakiya, 2016).

### **Effective Communication**

Communication involves imparting or exchanging information by speaking, writing or any other medium which can be understood by the parties involved. Effective communication is a process of exchanging ideas, thoughts, knowledge and information such that the purpose or intention is fulfilled in the best manner possible (Priya, 2018). Communication could be verbal or non-verbal. The essence of effective communication cannot be overemphasized as its usefulness cuts across all the courses of study.

### **Team work**

Team work is the combined action of a group, especially for effective and efficient output. A team comprises of a leader and team members. It is important that all team members are conversant with the task needed to achieve the goals ahead. In home economics, team work occurs from time to time, it is therefore that important that the students understand how to collaborate and cooperate, build and develop their emotional intelligence and work together without friction to achieve their desired outcome (Shakiya, 2016).

### **Approaches to How these Skills can be Translated into Activities during the Period of Study**

#### **1. Being Creative and Resourceful**

The goal is to explore options and alternatives, implementing ideas, problem solving and taking action. The programme includes, Students applying design briefs process in the making of textile items for individuals or the home. Problem solving occurs within the context of real-world issues, and the approach adopted should integrate academic and workforce preparation.

#### **2. Being Literate**

The goal is to express ideas clearly and accurately. The programme could be, Students demonstrating the importance of effective communication by making a complaint about a consumer issue by letter/email.

#### **3. Being Numerate**

The goal is to developing a positive, disposition towards investigating, reasoning and problem solving, estimating, predicting and calculating. Students apply their numerical skills in the preparation of a budget; adapting recipe ingredients; weighing and measuring out ingredients; room planning; and measuring fabrics.

#### **4. Communicating**

The goal is to stimulate discussions and debates, using numbers. Students would be made to discuss family relationships and the role of communication in strengthening relationships.

Students could engage in activities such as conducting a lunch time survey on the consumption of sugar sweetened beverages among a sample of the student body. Students could devise a poster campaign displaying the results and promoting a healthy eating message. Promote health by taking action to increase awareness of how food choices affect the health and well-being of a community or group of people.

**5. Managing Information and Thinking**

The goal is to stimulate creative and critical thinking, using ICT and digital media to access, manage and share content.

Students, using technology, will work collaboratively to plan a healthy, balanced menu for one day.

**6. Managing Self**

The goal is to make considered decisions. Students will work through a case study on purchasing a new piece of technology for personal use utilizing their financial literacy skills in identifying their available resources and needs and wants.

**7. Health Consciousness**

The goal is to promote being healthy and physically active, being confident and being positive about learning. Students will work collaboratively to investigate the nutritional requirements of a particular stage of the lifecycle. Students will participate in peer evaluation of student dishes in a positive and constructive manner. They could also distinguish between real and perceived food-handling risks in the school environment and develop strategies to take appropriate action at either the school level or a personal level to address these risks. Students could also constructively evaluate each other's textile items.

**8. Team Work**

The goal is to contribute to making the world a better place. Students would be advised on a sustainable everyday practice that can be applied in the home e.g. preventing food waste. Students could be given opportunities to analyse and evaluate the attitudes and interpersonal skills that enable people to participate fully and effectively as community members in a sustainable society.

**How the Programmes and Goals would Contribute to Sustainable Development**

Life skills based home economics education can be beneficial in targeting lax behaviors in students and encouraging involvement in class activities. The focus on methodology and skills rather than simple information dissemination allows life skills programs to mimic the student's natural learning processes. As a result, these programs can effectively bring a shift in focus in the student's attitude of just taking notes they don't read to practical approaches towards learning. Life skills are a necessary complement to academic education in tertiary institutions, where schools do not emphasize development of character. Life skills are generally universally applicable and can be further tailored to meet the needs of a specific community. The programmes and goals would therefore contribute to sustainable development thus;

1. **Creativity and Resourcefulness:** Creativity allows people to utilize and express their individuality. This skill would be very useful to meeting all the sustainable development goals that have direct bearings with Home Economics Education and they are: Goal 1: no poverty, Goal 2: zero hunger, Goal 3: good health and wellbeing, Goal 6: clean water and sanitation, Goal 8: decent work and economic growth, Goal 9: industry, infrastructure and innovation, Goal 12: responsible production and consumption, Goal 13: climate action and Goal 17: partnership for the goals.
2. **Communicating and being literate:** Communication is a skill every person needs to build relationships and interact with other people. Acquired literacy skill would boost communication. Effective communication and the realization that body language also conveys messages to other people is an important tool to enter a professional job. Skillful communication would be helpful to meeting the following goals; Goal 8: decent work and economic growth, Goal 9: industry, infrastructure and innovation, Goal 17: partnership for the goals.
3. **Managing Information and Thinking:** Critical thinking skills allow one to fully analyze and assess problems or situations. They are tools to put pieces of a puzzle together and understand the different parts while also thoroughly processing information to deliver intelligent and impactful inputs during conversations. This skill would contribute to meeting: Goal 1: no poverty, Goal 2: zero hunger, Goal 3: good health and wellbeing, Goal 8: decent work and economic growth, Goal 9: industry, infrastructure and innovation, Goal 13: climate action and Goal 17: partnership for the goals.
4. **Managing self and Health Consciousness:** This deals with how an individual views him or herself and is therefore able to take decisions that be beneficial to their wellbeing. It relates to self-worth and topics that stem from that such as looking after oneself. As such it encompasses concepts such as hygiene and personal safety. Managing self would contribute to meeting the following goals: Goal 1: no poverty, Goal 2: zero hunger, Goal 3: good health and wellbeing, Goal 6: clean water and sanitation, Goal 8: decent work and economic growth, Goal 9: industry, infrastructure and innovation, Goal 12: responsible production and consumption and Goal 17: partnership for the goals.
5. **Team Work:** This value would help to bridge divisions in society and allow for cooperation and unity. It would lead to decreased gender/social status discrimination, while increasing productivity in official environments. Team work

learned as a skill would be invaluable to meeting all set goals as no particular individual can do it all alone.

### **Recommendations**

1. It is recommended that tutors of home economics in tertiary institutions should adopt appropriate teaching methodologies in their implementation of life skills-based education. The methodologies should focus on achieving the best learning outcomes in students.
2. The National Commission for Colleges of Education, NCCE and the National Universities Commission, NUC should develop teaching curriculum that would incorporate life skills-based education. This is because, there have been records of successful outcomes in countries where it has been made part of the curriculum.
3. Tutors of home economics in the tertiary education sector should be encouraged to participate in trainings towards teaching programs that encourage life skills training as the potential gains of life skills based education are far reaching.
4. Some of the courses in the home economics curriculum are practical oriented while the rest are not. The course objectives of courses that do not have practical interpretations could be adjusted to include elements of creativity, critical thinking and communication and other skills as may be required.

### **Conclusion**

“Education is an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development”. All sustainable development programmes, including education for sustainable development (ESD) and life skill approaches, must consider the local environmental, economic, and societal conditions (United Nations, 2017). Education for sustainable development is based on ideals and principals that underlie sustainability, such as intergenerational equity, gender equity, social tolerance, poverty alleviation, environmental preservation and restoration, natural resource conservation, and just and peaceable societies. Quality education calls for using a life-skills approach in education and ESD calls for including skills in reorienting education to address sustainability. Learning a variety of skills will prepare individuals for a more successful life at home, in their communities, and in the workforce. People use a variety of skills in the full range of human activities: interacting with family and community members and when acting as an individual, a member of a group, and an employee or entrepreneur. Rather than simply letting students learn skills by observing people live and interact around them, educational systems should intentionally teach a breadth of skills. In a life-skills

approach to home economics education, students would become aware of, develop, use, and practice a wide variety of skills within the safety of the learning environment.

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