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Case Study

Implementation of home economics primary curriculum: a case study of a rural school in Masvingo, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This present study focused on the implementation of the Home Economics primary curriculum in the Zimbabwean school with particular reference to teaching and learning methods and resources. A qualitative paradigm was used in the form of a case study at one primary school in Gutu District of Zimbabwe. Five teachers were sampled using a convenience sampling technique from a population of fifteen teachers. Ten pupils were sampled from Grades Three to Seven. Interviews and non-participant observations were used to collect qualitative data. Data collected was presented in narrative form. Findings were that the teaching methods used fell short of satisfying the hands-on approach which is recommended for imparting appropriate problem-solving, knowledge and skills. It was also established that teachers blamed failure to effect appropriate Home Economics methods on insufficient Home Economics knowledge, skills and instructional materials. The major recommendation made was that subject specialists be deployed at every primary school to teach the subject and to facilitate school based staff development for teacher empowerment.

Keywords: Implementation, Home Economics, primary, school, rural.

Introduction

The Zimbabwean Home Economics (hereafter to be referred to as H/E) primary school curriculum is covered over a period of seven years. In Zimbabwe, Home Economics as a discipline covers Cookery, Needlework and Home Management. Consumerism, Health and Safety are imbedded in Home Management. The main aim of the discipline is on providing the basic skills and knowledge for future academic advancement, problem-solving and better quality of life[1-4]. Specifically in this 21st Century, the major aim of H/E needs to focus on how to address social problems, for example problems caused by the high loss of the adult population (particularly parents) to the Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) pandemic. Achievement of any of the goals is largely premised on H/E teaching and learning from the onset of one's educational life. The primary school is the foundation for all other educational levels[5]. As the basis of future endeavors the quality has a bearing on an individual's academic achievements in all educational disciplines. Above all the goals, the focus of this study is on the implementation of the H/E curriculum for problem-solving and improved quality of life.

Practical/technical subject is best taught when theory is linked to practical[6,7]. The approach in which the subjects are taught should be pragmatic. The Primary school H/E Syllabus have a section where methods of teaching which are pragmatic in nature are listed. Home Economics teachers should adhere to the 'hands-on' style as it gives emphasis to, *A hands-on approach enables pupils to develop manipulative skills needed in the preparation and cooking of food, securing … and cleaning the living environment*[8]. This may imply that method(s) used by teachers should be practical and allow for active participation by pupils. Effective teaching of practical subjects can be achieved when leaners interact with the environment as they learn by doing[9]. Research related to H/E has addressed teachers' attitudes towards H/E[10] and H/E quality in Zimbabwean Secondary Schools[11]. Evidently, not much research has been done on the teaching of H/E in Zimbabwean primary schools, which is the focus of the present study.

Rationale of this Study: This study was prompted by reports from Teaching Practice experiences by the student teachers from Masvingo Teachers College from period 2013-2015. The reports reflected discrepancies between intended Zimbabwe Primary H/E curriculum and the actual curriculum implemented. Pupils should be afforded the opportunity to understand and practice all processes no matter how short the period of study[8]. The two research questions that this study sought to answer are: i. Do primary school pupils experience appropriate teaching methods and activities in the learning of H/E? ii. Are there adequate resources to promote effective teaching and learning of H/E?

Conceptual Framework: The study was guided by some pragmatic assumptions to the teaching and learning of worthwhile education[12]. The Ministry of Education, Sports and

Culture emphasizes use of the hands-on approach to H/E teaching and learning in order to accentuate its practical nature and also to inculcate respect for manual work[8]. This is very important because human life depends mostly on the produce of human labour, for instance, good health is premised on healthy diet, living in a clean environment, smart and adequate 'dress', to mention just a few. Pragmatism is the overriding philosophical tool in shaping the H/E curriculum. From the philosophy, there are five assumptions which suggest how knowledge and skills should be imparted to learners[12]. Since the theory (pragmatism) strongly advocates learning by doing, the position adopted in this study is that the assumptions are useful in guiding the teaching of subjects of an inclusive practical nature inclusive of H/E. For the purpose of this study, three of the assumptions were used and these are examined below.

Ideas should be tested and acted upon in order for successful implementation[12]. The implication may be that for H/E knowledge to be applicable to pupils' social problems, it must be experimented first. Such an assumption justifies the utility of experimentation as a teaching and learning technique for H/E. The other assumption is that education should address both the body and the mind [12]. In a nutshell, the inference drawn here is that H/E education must be holistic in order to produce products which are competent to use acquired knowledge as well as skills to solve their day-to-day life problems. Knowledge retention is for the brain while skills application is for the body. Apparently, today's Zimbabwean society is devastated by a number of social problems, for example, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, which leaves most children orphaned, economic hardships resulting in food and clothing shortages to mention just a few. The society thus, values members who can apply knowledge and also adapt to different circumstances. Brubacher John Seilar[13] reiterates that *"In Dewey (the pragmatist), there is no genuine knowledge without doing"*. Worthwhile knowledge is attained through interaction of the organism and its environment[9].

Curriculum Implementation: The term curriculum implementation in this study is

The operation during which process the learner should acquire both the planned or intended, incidental or unintended experiences, knowledge, skills, ideas and attitudes that are aimed at enabling him/her to survive in his/her particular society[14].

Guided by the definition, the study examined how teachers put into practice the planned learning experiences they derive from the respective H/E Syllabi.

Teaching Methods and Activities

The realization of primary school H/E curriculum aims and objectives is basically achieved through effective teaching methods. Effective teaching and learning to take place when teaching methods are selected prudently by identifying those instructional procedures that are best suitable to creating a conducive and proper learning atmosphere[15,16]. Multi-sense participatory methods are best for facilitating easy gaining of skills and fast learning of concepts[17-19]. The use of participatory strategies take all pupils aboard especially the slow and introverts as they provide them with the chance to do some work, express themselves and share ideas with other pupils[21,22]. Various teaching methods that may be used by teachers for successful H/E teaching are different methods of demonstrating, field trips, group discussions, self discovery and group experimentation methods[7,16,18,19,22].

In the teaching of HE subjects it is recommended that various types of demonstrations such as spot, whole and step by step be regularly used as a teaching technique since it provides practitioners the chance to illustrate and explain certain processes before pupils practice[7,23]. Every teacher demonstration should be followed by pupil activities and practice[7]. When pupils engage in practical activities; immediately after observations it enables them to acquire the skills quickly[2,20]. "People learn 20% of what they hear, 40% of what they see, and 80% of what they do for themselves[26]. Demonstrations can be done by the teacher only if there are insufficient material resources for pupil to practice later[19].

Field-trips are essential as they give pupils the time to be involved in a similar environment when they are outside the classroom environment for some time to study a phenomenon[1,12,19]. The teaching method assists pupils to understand the practical nature of H/E subjects and also to grasp some concepts which usually appear to be too abstract if learning is confined to the classroom situation only. For example, pupils who have visited the cotton processing plant in Kadoma Textiles may see the actual process in progress and this is more practical rather than just hearing from the teacher's explanations. This may imply that fields-trips are critical in connecting the subject and the industry in order to broaden pupils' subject knowledge. However, to be effective[15,16] assert that field trips require teachers who are well sponsored and are able to plan the educational trips.

Conventional schools are a miniature society which has the responsibility of socializing school children. This may mean that school programmes that involve pupils at school should look like those of the societies in which they live. In this regard, the discussion method becomes most appropriate. Together with other methods such as the group work pupils are involved in social interaction that encourages full participation as part of a society. Discussion method as a participatory way which empowers learners to identify problems so that they discuss and the as a group suggest solutions[6,26].

Self discovery methods are pivotal as the give pupils the opportunity that enables them to have the responsibility of their own learning and findings[15,16,19]. Discovery teaching methods focus on self motivation rather than extrinsic motivation, which

in turn encourage creativity, critical thinking and deeper understanding of concepts[6,20,21]. Teachers should realize that leaving learners to realize their level of knowledge arouses learners' intrinsic motivation to learn and in most cases to come up with more realistic and practical solutions to their problems.

Teachers are encouraged to engage pupils in experiments to encourage them to find solutions through use of the laboratory. It is through experiments that facts and worthiness of knowledge and skills is proved[3,28]. This method is very effective when used together with other methods such as discovery; demonstration and discussion. A combination of all these methods may equip learners with problem-solving skills. For novice teachers, such methods are easy to use since the teachers lack the experience and what it takes to be an effective H/E teachers. As for an experienced teacher it is also not enough to be an expert without a conducive learning environment for teaching and learning of H/E subjects.

The provision of resources and the environment are critical issues in teaching and learning. The availability and non-availability of resources greatly influence the quality of teaching and learning[29]. For effective teaching and learning of H/E subjects the provision of equipment and consumables is pivotal. Most Zimbabwean primary schools lack basic resources[7,19]. This implies that the resource problems have currently grip Zimbabwe's H/E learning in general. *The overarching problem of the year 2000 will be finding resources to bring about qualitative improvements in education. Schools… infrastructure are still characterized by a widespread absence of essential facilities such as workshops, laboratories….*[29]. Parents in Zimbabwe are overburdened by the responsibility of almost wholly fund the education of their children to the extent that some parents are failing to cope with the demands[29]. The situation has caused anxiety among home economics teachers as the lack basic consumables which are needed for teaching and learning to take place. HE teachers are encouraged to use locally available materials but this reduces the use of a variety of skills. *Every community is a gold mine of resources for teaching*[30].

Methodology

A qualitative paradigm in the form of a case study was used to gain insight into the actual practices in H/E teaching or learning in the primary school. This was done to enable interaction with participants in their natural setting. Interviews and non-participant observation were used to collect qualitative data from the participants under study.

Convenience sampling technique was used to select the studied primary school which was easily accessible to the researchers[31-33]. Purposive sampling was used to extract five teachers and ten pupils. Grade three to seven teachers and their classes were chosen because it was felt that application of H/E teaching methods were more comprehensive at junior level than with infant classes.

Instruments: Different data collection tools were used to enable triangulation of findings for validity and reliability[34-36]. Interviews were used to gather data from the school head, teachers and pupils. The interviews permitted conversation which was essential for bringing the research participants and the researchers to the same operational level[31,34]. Interviews were considered suitable for eliciting participants' opinions, knowledge and feelings about their contact in H/E teaching and learning. Apparently, conversations enlightened the researchers on teachers' actual experiences and the real problems that impinged on appropriate teaching of the subject.

The school head was interviewed with the assumption that as an administrator, he would be more willing to talk than to write[35,32]. It was also hoped that the head would have ample opportunity to express his views as much as possible on matters regarding H/E teaching at the school. Structured interview questions were used for pupils as they were considered easy and quick to answer. Furthermore, structured questions yield data that is easy to present and analyze[32].

Non-participant observation of H/E lessons was done in a period of four weeks. Eight lessons per class were observed. The use of non-participant observation enabled the researchers to have a true reflection of the actual teaching and learning of the subject in the primary school. Observations are used because they collect primary data which reflects the reality on the ground[37,38]. An observation guide was designed and behaviour was recorded as it occurred. Document analysis was done to triangulate data obtained from interviews and observations with the thrust of examining disparities rather than similarities among the H/E syllabus, the teachers' documents and the actual teaching. Documents studied were the official Zimbabwe Home Economics syllabus and teachers' record books.

Data collection procedure: Ethical issues such as permission to conduct the study were observed as the team sought consent from the District Educational Officer for Gutu District of Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. The study was first conducted in June 2018.

Data Analysis: Descriptive analysis and tables were used.

Results and discussion

The findings established that, the manner in which the H/E curriculum was implemented was not congruent to expectations of subject worthiness. There were gross discrepancies between the intended and the actual H/E curriculum. H/E curriculum implementation was compromised by improper use of teaching methods as well as lack of resources.

A summary of pupils' responses to the teaching methods and learning resources experienced are shown on Table-1.

Table-1: Pupils' perceptions of H/E teaching methods and activities.

Statements	Responses	
	Yes	No
The teacher teaches by showing us ways of doing new tasks in sewing, cookery and laundry.	3	7
We sometimes visit places to learn about H/E.	1	9
I can wash my clothes because of knowledge and skills gained from H/E.	4	6
The school provides us with sewing and food and nutrition equipment	2	8
The teacher asks us to bring sewing and food and nutrition small equipment.	10	0

Table-1 shows that three of the participants agreed that the demonstration method was used while seven participants indicated that the method was not used. There was an overwhelming disagreement on the use of field-trips methods as nine participants pointed out that the technique was not used and only one participant indicated that the method was used. As regards pupils' experiences in laundry, four of the participants said that they could wash their clothes from H/E-gained knowledge and skills, while six participants indicated lack of knowledge and inability to wash clothes. Two respondents agreed that the school provided learning resources for sewing and food and nutrition while eight of the respondents disagreed that the resources were provided. All respondents indicated that they were asked to bring small equipment and tools.

The findings from the pupils evidenced severe discrepancies in the teaching methods and activities that pupils experienced in H/E learning. The appropriate scenario would be a situation where learners would acquire worthwhile H/E knowledge and skills through practical engagement[1,9,40,41]. Prescriptions on H/E teaching would also enable correct or effective implementation of the primary H/E curriculum[9].

The general findings from lesson observations were that the question and answer, discussion and demonstration methods were commonly used. It was unfortunate that the question and answer strategy was more favoured than the pro-active demonstration and discussion methods. After all, the last two are the ones that are congruent with the syllabus prescriptions. When asked to state any five teaching methods which they often used for H/E teaching, four of the five teachers managed only three and only one teacher indicated that she used five methods. The teachers' responses on the teaching methods which they used in their H/E lessons reflected insufficient use of appropriate teaching methods. Teachers' responses also confirmed a limited use of appropriate H/E teaching methods such as the use of demonstration and discussion methods.

Failure to employ various suitable teaching methods could be an indication that teachers' selection of teaching methods and activities was not guided by syllabus specifications or it could be due to lack of knowledge about H/E teaching as some two teachers indicated. These could be teachers who trained during the period when male student teachers were required to do woodwork and agriculture while only females did H/E. Expressing inadequacy of H/E knowledge and skills, one of the participants said, *As male staff we sometimes fail to implement H/E curriculum methodologically due to lack of adequate knowledge*. Such teachers are now expected to teach H/E. The other two teachers said they had gained little H/E knowledge during teachers' training period. This could be an indication that H/E is not thoroughly covered at teachers' colleges maybe due to time constraints. Only one teacher had specialist H/E knowledge and was able to implement the five teaching methods.

The question and answer method, which was favoured by all the participants, violates the child-centred learning assumption[42]. It tends to accord the teacher the centre stage as the master of knowledge[1,12]. The method also impinges upon the hands-on approach which is cherished by pragmatic principles[6,39]. This therefore hampers pupils' attainment of transferrable life-long knowledge and skills. Dewey strongly argues that learning without doing does not produce genuine knowledge[24,13]. Epistemologically, the question and answer strategy promotes the traditionalist perspective of real knowledge as that which comes from the mind. Thus, teachers need to know that H/E teaching and learning situations that deny pupils the opportunity to practise learnt processes are not proper. However, the question and answer strategy can be exploited to a lesser extent, just to aid the teacher's knowledge of pupils' mastery of concepts[20].

The demonstration method, though appropriate, was seldom used and again it was rather teacher-centered. Pupils were not given time to practise the learnt skills. Although[19] recommend sole teacher demonstrations in the absence of adequate facilities, it may not be common practice. Limiting demonstrations to the teacher stifles pupils' participatory learning and impairs knowledge acquisition and retention. Demonstrations should precede pupil practice hence it is necessary that pupils practise the learnt skills on their own[7]. Since H/E is intended to impart life-long knowledge and skills, knowledge retention is longer when pupils do things for themselves[42]. It is also through practice that teachers can evaluate how much pupils have understood and acquired.

Observations made during discussion type of lessons were that they were teacher- centered. Teachers did most of the talking at the expense of the pupils. It needs to be noted that the socialization of pupils into society may not be effectively achieved if pupils are denied the opportunity to participate in discussion in learning situations. In order to desist from disadvantaging the pupils, teachers need to be conscious that

their role in H/E discussions is to facilitate or guide as well as encourage pupil participation by all[16].

Analysis of the scheme-cum plans unearthed that discussions were the commonest method and activity planned for. More often, discussions were used at the expense of practical learning. For example, the following statements showed how discussions were planned. i. Pupils discuss the methods of preserving food. ii. Pupils discuss washing up.

There were no indications of discussions being followed by practical activities. A discussion on food preservation methods, for example, would be worthwhile if it was followed by pupils practising food preservation techniques such as drying, jam making or smocking. The Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture enphasises practising of learnt skills as much as possible. Primary school pupils need to be empowered with such skills as those mentioned above and many others. As established, the manner in which H/E was taught was evident that the implementation was not congruent to expectations of subject worthiness. There were gross discrepancies between the intended and the actual H/E curriculum.

Findings established that learning resources were largely unavailable as expressed by one participant who said "*No cooking oil, no frying methods*". Probed if the teachers could bring some of the resources, just for instructional demonstrations by either the teacher or pupils, the response was: "At times, I the teacher may not have resources too, especially when the Government does not give us enough money". Lack of resources in the twenty-first century is really a challenge [28]. Indeed the school studied was hard hit by shortage of H/E learning materials resulting from rampant economic hardships which were currently facing Zimbabwe. The resource problem to a great extent limited H/E learning activities to merely theory work. While the curriculum planners emphasise exposing pupils to as much practical work as possible, this was not feasible. The Zimbabwe Ministry of Education Sport and Culture encouraged the use locally available resources in the teaching of H/E seemed to have fallen on deaf ears since lessons were characteristically theoretical as established through data collected from pupils and lesson observations[8]. Lack of teaching resource materials to another extent thwarted effective curriculum implementation[29,28].

Conclusion

The findings from the current research study indicated that the implementation of the HE curriculum is facing challenges ranging from methodology and provision of resources. The intended primary H/E curriculum was designed to equip pupils with life-long practical skills which are based on a pragmatic approach. However, what is happening at schools is almost contrary to the curriculum on paper. Pupils are not given enough time, resources and appropriate methods which result in high acquisition of skills. Some teachers were failing to effectively the methods due to lack of appropriate resources and in some cases due to lack of knowledge.

For the realization of a worthwhile H/E curriculum implementation this study recommends that, there is need for in service of teachers. Cluster or school-based government sponsored staff development sessions on H/E syllabus interpretation coupled with some demonstration lessons by H/E subject specialists may improve on the implementation of the HE curriculum. In addition, school heads need to support the teaching and learning of H/E in order to supply adequate resources and also to motivate teachers to upgrade their subject knowledge through further education.

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