

Assessing the Challenges of Teaching and Learning Home Economics at the Junior High School Level

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ABSTRACT

One cannot dispute the fact that schools play critical role in the performance of learners. Pupils in school are exposed to the same instructional activities but their performances differ. The purpose of this study is to explore challenges of teaching and learning of Home Economics in Ebuom Municipal Assembly (M/A) Junior High School (JHS). The study adopted a case study. A sample size of 9 comprising of 6 students and 3 teachers. Interview was the research instrument utilized. Qualitative data analysis such as thematic data analysis was used in analyzing the data. From the study, it was revealed that, the environment of Ebuom M/A JHS contributed to the challenges in teaching home economics and students contributed negatively to the challenges of teaching and learning home economics. From the study, it is concluded that Students should be made aware that home economics is for all students. School environment should be made friendly by school authorities to enable home economics lessons to be attractive. From the study it is recommended that the Ghana education service should provide more tools and equipment to schools to improve learning of Home Economics.

Keywords: Home economics, teaching, learning, teachers, students

INTRODUCTION

Home economics education is an important aspect of education in Ghana that aims to equip learners with practical skills and knowledge to manage their homes and families effectively. The subject encompasses a range of areas, including food and nutrition, clothing and textiles, housing, and family development. Teaching and learning home economics in Ghana face numerous challenges, including the lack of qualified teachers, inadequate resources and facilities, lack of relevance, and language barrier. These challenges have a significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the subject. This paper explores the current state of teaching and learning home economics in Ghana, highlighting the challenges faced and proposing strategies for improvement.

Home Economics is one of the vocational subjects of Basic Design and Technology taught in Ghana Education Service and it is designed to provide sufficient practical skills to prepare learners for subsequent training or entry into the world of work. Home Economics as a skill-oriented, decision-making subject, that equips learners with skills and knowledge which will help them to be self-employed and at the same time, contribute effectively to the socio-economic development of the family and society. It comprises of Sewing and catering and taught at the JHS level of the Basic School of Ghana.

The teaching of Home Economics as a practical subject is crucial if the needed skills, knowledge, values and attitudes are to be imparted in the learners. It is critical that teachers have the professional competencies necessary to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes to learners.

As a teacher teaching Home Economics, I observed that there is poor performance of students in Home Economics subject. I reflected more and more on what could be the cause of this situation and I ultimately began to question the effectiveness of the quality of teaching and pedagogy. I sought answers, but I could not come up with factors leading to poor performance of student's teachers in Home Economics. Therefore, I decided to explore this phenomenon in depth to answer the questions above.

Home economics teachers in Ghana face several challenges that hinder effective teaching. Firstly, many teachers lack the necessary training and qualifications to teach the subject effectively (Akyeampong, 2017). This problem is compounded by the fact that home economics is not a popular subject among teacher trainees, and many teachers are posted to teach the subject without the requisite training and preparation (Akyeampong et al., 2013).

Secondly, the lack of resources and facilities is a significant challenge, particularly in rural areas, where access to kitchens, sewing machines, and other equipment is limited (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2019). These challenges affect the quality of teaching and the ability of teachers to provide practical training to their students.

Students face several challenges in learning home economics in Ghana, including the lack of relevance of the subject to their lives and the language barrier. Many students view home economics as irrelevant to their future careers and struggle to see the practical application of the concepts they learn in class (Ataa-Nyarko, 2014). Additionally, English is the language of instruction in Ghana, and many students who come from non-English speaking backgrounds find it difficult to understand the subject (Generoso & Arbon, 2020). These challenges affect students' motivation to learn and their ability to apply the concepts taught in class.

When students perform poorly, the implication is that adequate teaching and learning has not taken place in basic schools (Bizimana et al., 2021; Otieno, 2010). According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, globally, about 617 million children and adolescents are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. This suggests that there is a significant learning crisis in many countries, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this crisis, with many students experiencing extended school closures, remote learning challenges, and disrupted education systems (UNESCO, 2017). In Ghana, for example, the latest national assessment of basic school students' performance, the National Education Assessment (NEA) conducted in 2019, showed that only about 14% of pupils in primary 6 and 18% in JHS 3 achieved proficiency in mathematics, while only about 33% of pupils in primary 6 and 49% in JHS 3 achieved proficiency in English Language. These results indicate that there is a significant gap between expected and actual learning outcomes in basic schools, which may be attributed, in part, to inadequate teaching and learning (Nugba et al., 2021).

It is against this backdrop that the study investigates the challenges of teaching and learning of Home Economics in Ebuom M/A JHS.

The purpose of this study is to explore challenges of teaching and learning of Home Economics in Ebuom M/A JHS.

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. How does the school environment contribute to challenges of teaching and learning of Home Economics in Ebuom M/A JHS?
2. How does students contribute to the challenges of teaching and learning of Home Economics in Ebuom M/A JHS?

Home economics education is an essential aspect of education that equips learners with the knowledge and skills necessary to manage their homes and families effectively. Home economics education in Ghana covers a range of subjects, including food and nutrition, clothing and textiles, housing, and family development. Despite its importance, there are several challenges associated with teaching and learning home economics in Ghana that need to be addressed. This study discusses the challenges of teaching and learning home economics in Ghana and provides recommendations for addressing these challenges. The findings of this study will be significant to a number of relevant stakeholders. They include the parents, pupils and the government of Ghana.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Home economics is a discipline that deals with the management of household activities and its components, including food, nutrition, clothing, housing, family development, consumerism, and finance. It is an important aspect of life, and the teaching and learning of home economics provide students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to manage their homes and families effectively. However, there are several challenges associated with teaching and learning home economics that need to be addressed. According to Owolabi (1987), Home economics in secondary schools faces several challenges, including inadequate laboratory space, lack of equipment and funding, and a shortage of qualified teachers. However, a potential solution to these issues is the development of collaborative curricula and local cooperative initiatives, which could help address resource shortages in specific areas. This literature review discusses the challenges of teaching and learning home economics and suggests ways to overcome these challenges.

School Environment and Teaching and Learning of Home Economics

Clare (2018) examined that the school is a fundamental determinant in the behavior and motives of the students because it is a center of learning and socialization. The school characteristics particularly the resource factors, directly impact on the easiness of learning and this translates into attitude formation by the students.

Clare (2018) identified school factors such as the classroom environment, resource availability and the focus of the study of students for example participatory nature of the laboratory work as key in influencing the student's motivation towards the subjects. He concluded that the participation of the students in practical lessons may produce more positive attitude toward the study of students and consequently lead to better performance. Students with facilitating environment (with available resources, motivating teachers) enable students to develop a positive attitude towards the subject in focus unlike those with no laboratories. The situations in

Ormrod (2006) observed that in addition to providing support for academics, the libraries also help students with personal development. He further identified that several-affective outcomes, including self-confidence, self-sufficiency, an increased sense of responsibility and broaden world view each associated in some way with the overall positive impact of the library.

Marshall (2004) investigated the relationship between characteristics of schools, such as the physical structure of a school building and the interactions between students and teachers and students' performance. He noted that teacher's school characteristics are to diverse factors that both affect and help to define the intricate relationship between the school environment and students' performance. School environment has been researched for many years and continues to be examined and defined as a result of its significant influences on educational outcomes

Challenges of Teaching Home Economics:

One of the major challenges of teaching home economics is the lack of qualified and competent teachers. Many home economics teachers are not adequately trained in the subject area, and this affects the quality of teaching and learning. A study by Mupfumira (2011) found that many home economics teachers in Zimbabwe lacked the necessary qualifications and training to teach the subject effectively. This problem is not limited to Zimbabwe; similar findings have been reported in other countries, such as Nigeria (Adeyemi, 2019) and Pakistan (Rashid & Asghar, 2016).

Another challenge of teaching home economics is the lack of resources and facilities. Home economics is a practical subject that requires access to adequate facilities and resources, such as kitchens, sewing machines, and other equipment. However, many schools lack these resources, making it difficult for teachers to provide practical training to their students (Paas & Palojoki, 2019).

A third challenge of teaching home economics is the negative perception of the subject. Many people perceive home economics as a low-status subject that is only suitable for girls. This perception discourages students, particularly boys, from taking the subject seriously, and this affects the quality of teaching and learning. A study by Gudyanga et al. (2019) found that many students in Zimbabwe viewed home economics as a subject for girls and lacked interest in the subject.

Challenges of Learning Home Economics:

One of the major challenges of learning home economics is the abstract nature of the subject. Home economics deals with abstract concepts such as nutrition, family development, and consumerism, which can be difficult for students to understand. This challenge is compounded by the lack of practical training and hands-on experience, which makes it difficult for students to apply the concepts they learn in class (Brown, 1979).

Another challenge of learning home economics is the lack of relevance of the subject to students' lives. Many students view home economics as irrelevant to their lives and future careers, and this affects their motivation to learn (Pendergast, 2009). A study by Azubuike (2011) found that many students in Nigeria did not see the relevance of home economics to their future careers and lacked motivation to learn the subject.

A third challenge of learning home economics is the language barrier. Home economics is a subject that requires a good command of the English language, and this poses a challenge for students who are not proficient in English. This challenge is particularly acute in countries where English is not the primary language of instruction, such as Nigeria (Ogunyemi, 2015).

Students' contribution to the challenges of teaching and learning of home economics

In any school setting, significant among the environmental factors is that of the peers. At adolescent's age, student's attitude; motivation and learning behavior are greatly influenced by the peers (Hanushek et al., 2003). When most of the students have poor attitude towards the subject or the teacher, others jump in and follow their peers. Individual motivation is also affected by the motivation of the peers. Peer traits may be correlated with behavioral changes that influence achievement and may account for group differences in motivation for a given subject as well as academic achievement in that subject.

Aaronson et al. (2007) argue that it is difficult to place a causal interpretation on the peer measures but agree to the fact that there is a statistical association between a student's performance and that of her peers. The debate on peer influence has had negative focus say on negative behavior. It is important that this study focused on the contribution of the peers towards positive aspects of motivation and performance.

Teaching and learning home economics in Ghana face several challenges that need to be addressed to improve the quality of education in the subject. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort by policymakers, educators, and stakeholders. Strategies to improve teaching and learning include providing in-service training and professional development programs for teachers, improving access to resources and facilities, integrating practical components of home economics education into the curriculum, encouraging the study of home economics as a viable career option for students, and providing language support for students who come from non-English speaking backgrounds. By implementing these strategies, home economics education in Ghana can be improved, and students can be better equipped to manage their homes and families effectively.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The research design used was a case study. Case studies are designs of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009a, 2009b).

Population

Ebuom M/A is a school located in Ejura West Circuit of the Ejura Sekyeredumase District of the Ashanti Region of the Republic of Ghana. The school has an enrolment of 190 pupils comprising of 88 boys and 102 girls. The school has a teacher population of 15 teachers comprising 9 males and 6 females. The target population of the study consist of all pupils in the school. The accessible population consists of all JHS 2 pupils in the school.

Sample

A sample of 9 participants comprising of 6 pupils, 2 career technology teachers and the headteacher of Ebuom M/A JHS. The selection was not random but rather purposive or judgmental sampling. The six pupils in the sample may have been selected based on their age, grade level, academic performance, or behavior. As primary stakeholders in the basic school setting, they can provide insights into their experiences, needs, and expectations regarding the curriculum, teaching methods, school facilities, and extracurricular activities. Their opinions can also reflect the views of their parents or guardians, who are important secondary stakeholders.

The two career technology teachers in the sample may have been chosen because of their expertise in vocational education, which is a key component of the basic school curriculum. They can share their knowledge and experiences in teaching various skills and competencies, as well as their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the current curriculum and resources. They can also provide suggestions for improving the teaching and learning process and preparing students for the job market or further education.

The headmaster of the basic school is likely included in the sample because of their administrative role and leadership position. They can provide a broader perspective on the school's goals, policies, and challenges, as well as their vision for the school's future. They can also offer insights into the school's relationships with other stakeholders, such as the education ministry, the school board, the local community, and the media.

Inclusion criteria:

- Age range (e.g., 10-18 years for pupils)

- Grade level (e.g., from a specific class or year)
- Program of study (e.g., vocational education)
- Job title or role (e.g., headmaster, teacher)
- Years of experience (e.g., at least 2 years as a teacher)
- Consent to participate in the study

Exclusion criteria:

- Inability to communicate effectively in the research language (e.g., due to language barriers, disabilities, or cognitive impairments)
- Conflicts of interest (e.g., being a close relative or friend of the researcher or having a financial or personal stake in the research topic)
- Refusal to participate in the study.

Sampling technique

Non probability sampling technique was used in selecting the sample size of 9 participants. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the 6 pupils based on their performance in home economics. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the 2 teachers who were home economics teachers in the school and also the headteacher of the school.

Research instrument

I adopted these research instruments to collect data for this study. They are semi-structured interview, observation and document analysis. Semi-structured interview was used to collect data from the 6 pupils, 2 teachers and the headteacher. Sample of interview guide is Appendix A. Observation as a data collection instrument was used to collect data on the school environment which the interview data could not provide. Sample of Observation checklist is Appendix B. Document analysis was used in analysis documents such as past Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) statement of results, exercise books, school-based assessment books.

Data collection procedure

I conducted interviews using my mobile phone as the recording medium on the 6 pupils, 2 teachers and the headteacher. Interview sessions lasted for two minutes per participant. Also, observation was conducted and very salient points about the school and home economics lessons was taking. I analyzed results of the school's past BECE results and the school-based assessment of JHS 2 students.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the field through the use of semi-structured interview was analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a highly qualitative data analysis method (Dawson, 2002). The analysis started with the transcription of the audio-tape recordings. The researcher listened to each of the audio tapes repeatedly as he wrote down exactly what the respondents' said. The researcher then determined the analytical themes that were used for the analysis. The determination of the themes was guided by the research questions. Related data was categorized accordingly. The responses made were not attached to individual names but rather they were attached to codes already assigned to them by the researcher. The researcher used relevant quotations from the field and the literature to support respondents' views. This was done for all the research questions. Data from observation and document analysis was presented in tables using frequencies and percentages. Researchers seek ethical approval from relevant institutional review

boards or ethics committees before conducting research involving human participants. Researchers ensured that the data collected from participants are kept confidential and that participants’ privacy is respected. Participants were fully informed about the research project, its purpose, methods, risks, and benefits. They were also given the opportunity to ask questions and provide their consent to participate voluntarily. Researchers respected the dignity, rights, and autonomy of participants, including their cultural, religious, and social backgrounds. Researchers should ensure that participants are not coerced, manipulated, or exploited for the sake of research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents in the study were nine. This comprised of six pupils and three teachers from Ebuom M/A JHS in the Ejura Sekyeredumase District. The following codes were used for the analysis. T for teacher and P for pupils/student.

Demographic Features of Respondents

The sample comprises nine individuals, including six pupils, two career technology teachers, and the headmaster of the basic school. The demography of the participants is divided into three sections that provide information on the gender and qualifications of the participants.

In terms of gender, the majority of the pupils (66.67%) are male, while the remaining are female (33.33%). Among the teachers, two-thirds (66.67%) are female, while one-third (33.33%) are male. These gender ratios suggest that the study has a slightly higher representation of females than males, which may have implications for the research findings.

Regarding the qualifications of the teachers, two-thirds (66.67%) of the teachers hold Bachelor’s degrees, while one-third (33.33%) have a Diploma. This suggests that the teachers have varying levels of education, which may impact their teaching practices and approaches. We therefore provided basic overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants in table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic Features of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender of Pupils		
Male	4	66.67
Female	2	33.33
Gender of Teachers		
Male	1	33.33
Female	2	66.67
Qualification of Teachers		
Bachelors’ Degree	2	66.67
Diploma	1	33.33

Source: Field Work, January, 2022

How does the school environment contribute to challenges to the teaching and learning of Home Economics in Ebuom M/A JHS?

When teachers were asked whether they get In Service Training from school authorities, all the teachers responded that their school do organize In Service Training for them. T1 and T2 have this to say;

“We do have PLC every week to discuss about our methods adopted in teaching.”

When the pupils were asked whether they have interest in home economics as a subject, four of the pupils/students responded that they have interest in home economics as a subject. P1, P2 and P5 have this to say;

“We have interest in the subject.

It has taught me a lot concerning things we do in the house.

I have learnt so many things.

Now I can do things on my own especially mending torn buttons.”

This implies that teachers adopt best methods of teaching home economics Clare (2018) the participation of the students in practical lessons may produce more positive attitude toward the study of students and consequently lead to better performance. Students with facilitating environment (with available resources, motivating teachers) enable students to develop a positive attitude towards the subject in focus unlike those with no laboratories.

When teachers were asked whether they have equipment for teaching home economics, all the teachers confirmed that they have equipment for teaching home economics. Equipment like saucepans, coal pots, ovens, cutlery sets etc. T2 have this to say;

“We have some equipment used for practical works.

They are coal pots, tin oven, saucepans etc.”

When learners were asked about the materials and equipment used for home economics practical, all learners confirmed that some equipment like, sewing machine, coal pot, tin oven and other were in the school. P2 has this to say;

“We have coal pots, frying pan, sauce pans and sewing machines.”

This implies that Ebuom M/A JHS have equipment used in teaching Home Economics. Clare (2018) identified school factors such as the classroom environment, resource availability and the focus of the study of students for example participatory nature of the laboratory work as key in influencing the student's motivation towards the subjects.

When teachers were asked of who supports their practical lessons, they all said parents and at times old students. T1 has this to say;

“The parents of the learners and old students do provide for practical lessons.”

When pupils were asked who supports their practical lessons, all the learners confirmed that their parents and old students support their practical lessons. P2 for example had this to say;

“Our parents pay for our practical lessons and at times the old students too”.

This implies that practical lessons are being catered for by parents and old students. School environment has been researched for many years and continues to be examined and defined as a result of its significant influences on educational outcomes (Marshall, 2004).

How does students contribute to the challenges of teaching and learning of Home Economics in Ebuom M/A JHS?

When teachers were asked how boys perceive home economics as a subject, all the teachers, claimed boys perceive the subject as feminine. They further asserted that the boys claimed the subject is for girls. T2 had this to say;

“Boys perceive the subject to be for females.

They prefer technical skills to it”.

When learners were asked how boys perceive the subject, all of them stated that home economics were for girls but not boys. P2 has this to say;

“The subject is for girls not us”.

This implies that learners of Ebuom M/A JHS perceive home economics as subject for girls. Peer traits may be correlated with behavioral changes that influence achievement and may account for group differences in motivation for a given subject as well as academic achievement in that subject (Hanushek et al., 2003).

When teachers were asked if learners perceive home economics as expensive subject, all the teachers stated that the cost of practical lessons make the learners perceive the subject as expensive. T3 has this to say;

“The cost of practical makes the learners perceive the subject as expensive.”

When learners were asked if they perceive home economics as expensive subject, all of them stated yes and further explained that the cost they pay for practical lessons make them perceive the subject as expensive. P4 has this to say;

“We pay for practical that make it expensive. The cost of one practical burdens us.”

This implies that learners perceive home economics as expensive subject. Peer traits may be correlated with behavioral changes that influence achievement and may account for group differences in motivation for a given subject as well as academic achievement in that subject (Hanushek et al., 2003).

When teachers were asked whether learners access equipment and materials for practical all of them stated yes. They further stated that during practical lessons instructions are given and learners follow these instructions. T3 has this to say;

“The follow instructions to perform practical lessons.”

When learners were asked if they access materials used for home economics practical, all of them said yes. P3 has this to say;

“We are allowed to access practical materials.”

This implies that learners are allowed to access practical materials. Marshall (2004) investigated the relationship between characteristics of schools, such as the physical structure of a school building and the interactions between students and teachers and students' performance. He noted that teacher's school characteristics are to diverse factors that both affect and help to define the intricate relationship between the school environment and students' performance. School environment has been researched for many years and continues to be examined and defined as a result of its significant influences on educational outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was sought to explore challenges of teaching and learning of Home Economics in the Ebuom M/A JHS in the Ejura Sekyeredumase District of the Ashanti Region of the Republic of Ghana. The study made use of case study.

The population for the study was basic school pupils in Ebuom M/A JHS in Ejura Sekyeredumase District. A sample of 9 respondents was used comprising 6 pupils and their respective 3 teachers. The researcher made use convenience and purposive sampling techniques to obtain the schools and pupils.

The researcher made use of interview as the instrument for the study. Data obtained was analyzed qualitatively using thematic approach.

The environment of Ebuom M/A JHS contributed to the challenges in teaching home economics. In Service Training was organized, tools and equipment for practical lessons were available, etc. from this finding, it can be concluded that school environment should be made friendly by school authorities to enable home economics lessons to be attractive. Also, materials and equipment for practical lessons should be provided. Rooms for practical lessons should be made available for schools.

Students contributed negatively to the challenges of teaching and learning home economics. Boys in Ebuom M/A JHS attributed home economics to girls, learners also see the subject as expensive because their parents pay for practical lessons. In conclusion students should be made aware that home economics is for all students.

Teaching and learning home economics is associated with several challenges, including the lack of qualified teachers, resources, and facilities, negative perception of the subject, abstract nature of the subject, lack of relevance, and language barrier. To overcome these challenges, there is a need for concerted efforts by policymakers, educators, and stakeholders. The following recommendations were drawn based on our findings

1. The Ghana education service directorate in the Ejura Sekyeredumase District should provide more tools and equipment to schools to improve learning of Home Economics.
2. Teachers should be encouraged to partake career development programmes to enable them teach the subject effectively.
3. Parents should support their children through payment of fees for practical lessons.
4. Improving the training and qualifications of home economics teachers through in-service training and professional development programs.
5. Providing adequate resources and facilities for home economics education, particularly in rural areas.
6. Integrating practical components of home economics education into the curriculum to make the subject more relevant and engaging to students.
7. Encouraging the study of home economics as a viable career option for students.
8. Providing language support for students who come from non-English speaking backgrounds to enable them to understand and apply the concepts taught in class.

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