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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ASSESSING THE COOKING SKILLS OF HOME ECONOMICS STUDENTS IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Home economics is an essential part of learning in the colleges of education in the Nigerian higher education landscape. It offers the learners the opportunity to acquire basic home training required in contemporary societies. However, little is known about the cooking potentials of students enrolled in home economics. The present study assessed the cooking skills of home economics students in colleges of education in southeast Nigeria. Ninety-seven students were recruited from home economics departments in colleges of education in the southeast. The respondents completed a self-report measure of cooking skills. The percentage analysis showed that most students (61.11%) enrolled in home economics possess high cooking skills. The findings from the study have implications for increased enrollment in home economics and effective implementation of policies geared towards the development of home economics in the colleges of education in southeast Nigeria.

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Introduction:-

Home economics is an essential part of learning in the colleges of education in the Nigerian higher education landscape. It offers the learners the opportunity to acquire basic home training required in contemporary societies. Students enrolled in home economics in the colleges of education are exposed to various cooking styles and dietary knowledge. Thus, the students are trained to acquire necessary skills relating to cooking, dietary behavior, health maintenance, and eating behavior. The field of home economics has taken a new dimension to meet today's human needs in its present development and potential values. It prepares learners to be self-reliant and self-employed. It equips the students with essential cooking skills. Thus, cooking skills taught in colleges of education in Nigeria are crucial as it affects self-reliability, nutritional knowledge, dietary behavior, quality, and personal health. It also involves the home meal preparation and consumption process and how a household can handle stressful situations.

However, a growing insinuation suggests a decline in cooking and cooking skills and an increase in the consumption of already made foods. One possible path to growing cooking skills is through continuous education and training. Thus, students enrolled in home economics in the colleges of education in Nigeria are expected to be skilled in food preparation. The concern of the research is to determine the cooking skills of home economic students in colleges of education in Nigeria. Cooking is a valuable life skill commonly linked with healthier diet quality (Kuroko et al., 2020). The recent decade has witnessed an increasing call for home cooking to avert poor diets and chronic diet-related diseases (Lichtenstein & Ludwig, 2010).

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Similarly, Alpaugh et al. (2020) noted that home cooking is associated with higher-quality diets. A decrease in cooking may be linked with rises in obesity and risk factors for chronic illness. Accordingly, evidence has linked frequent consumption of homemade foods, including the constant uptake of fruit and vegetables with healthier foods (Mills et al., 2020; Wolfson et al., 2020). Cooking is an age-long concept that underlies the totality of human existence. Cooking is a complex task that entails assembling and transforming ingredients to produce a meal (Wolfson, Lahne, et al., 2020). The concept of cooking involves several skills and abilities that relate to the practical act of formulating ingredients and to the ability to prepare food within one's food environment while acknowledging the time and budget constraints (Boni, 2019; Wolfson, Bostic, et al., 2017). Cooking is a complex construct that is not regularly understood (Wolfson et al., 2016). However, it describes preparing food according to one's specifications and knowledge. Perhaps, the cooking process has a significant impact on food nutrition. Numerous literatures have associated home cooking with better health and wellbeing (Hart, 2019; LeRouge et al., 2019; Mills et al., 2017; Raber & Wolfson, 2021; Schönberg et al., 2020; Silver et al., 2021; Tani et al., 2021; Tani et al., 2020; Virudachalam et al., 2014; Yordanova et al., 2019). Consequently, a growing barrier to an adequate home meal is the basic skills related to preparing food. Thus, culinary skills are an essential component of home meal preparation.

Numerous factors exist that influence individual's propensity to prepare and eat healthy meals (Herbert et al., 2014). Cooking skills have attracted huge research attention in recent decades. Cooking skills represent a critical determinant of home cooking and a healthy diet in contemporary society. Cooking skills are mechanical or physical skills that describe combining ingredients and efficiently producing a healthy meal. It includes the cooking methods and food preparation techniques (Lavelle et al., 2017). Cooking skills entail the conceptual and perceptual skills related to food transformation (Short, 2003a, 2003b). While there is no consensus on the definition of cooking skills, it has been widely referred to as the overall capacity to undertake tasks associated with the preparation of a healthy meal, which involves knowledge of the basic procedures, such as washing, peeling, and chopping (Begley & Gallegos, 2010; Hartmann et al., 2013).

However, there is a common understanding that cooking skills do not necessarily guarantee food preparation from essential ingredients. Perhaps, researchers noted that most individuals possess poor knowledge and relevant skills relating to meal preparation (Nelson et al., 2013). Intimation suggests that cooking-related skills are beyond mechanical tasks. Factors such as cognitive abilities, basic meal concepts, cooking norms, planning, and hygiene-related skills are fundamental in meal preparation. Cognitive ability relates to the perceptual processes of food production, while basic meal concepts entail meal categorizations and associated ingredients. Cooking norms denote compliance to standards. Planning skills are essential and require persistent observation of daily meals such that they are not repetitive, while hygiene skills reflect the sanitary correlates of cooking.

Cooking skills have been increasingly included as an essential mechanism for preventing diet-related diseases and obesity (Lavelle et al., 2016; Nelson et al., 2013). Similarly, poor cooking skills have been linked to unhealthy diets (Adams et al., 2015; Burg et al., 2018; Hughes et al., 2004; Hutchinson et al., 2016; Li et al., 2021; Sandell et al., 2019; Tani et al., 2020; Wolfson, Frattaroli, et al., 2017). There has been a rising call to adopt cooking skills interventions to improve dietary outcomes. Literature indicates that these strategies differ in methodologies such as information provision, demonstrations, and practical hands-on sessions and have been targeted at individuals of all ages, including children, teenagers, and adults. While the rationale for targeting each group is clearly noted in each intervention, the optimal age for learning cooking skills regarding dietary outcomes is unknown. However, cooking practice in home economics education provides an essential platform for acquiring cooking skills. Therefore, the primary purpose of the present paper is to assess the cooking skills of home economics students in the colleges of education.

Method:-

The study adopted a convenience sampling approach. The participants comprised students enrolled in home economics departments in different colleges of education in southeast Nigeria. The students were approached between August and October 2021 and were asked to participate in the assessments to understand their cooking skills. The participants included students in the different years of study and comprised males and females aged between 18 and 28 years. Out of the original 132 approached for the study, only 109 consented to participate and signed the consent forms. Thus, the study questionnaire was administered to those who signed the consent form. They were briefed on the purpose of the research and were urged to respond to the items in the questionnaire with the assurance of confidentiality and protection. The completed questionnaires were retrieved on the spot. However, only the appropriately filled

questionnaires (i.e., 97) were used for subsequent analysis, while the remaining 12 copies were discarded due to improper filling.

Cooking skills were measured with a seven-item Linkert-type scale designed to assess cooking abilities. The scale included items such as 'I can cook complicated multi-course meals'; 'I can prepare many meals even without a recipe.' The respondents indicated how much the statements applied to them on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 'does not agree' to 6 'agree very much'. The Cronbach's 0.78 was recorded for the scale following a pilot study.

Result:-

The data from the respondents were analyzed in simple percentages. Table 1 below indicates the percentage score of the student's cooking skills. It shows that 61.11% of the respondents possess high cooking skills than their counterparts with low cooking skills, 32.98%. Also, table 2 shows the percentage score of the participants according to their year of study. The result showed that the students scored high in cooking skills in their final year, 31.04%, followed by year three students 24.25%. Meanwhile, those in their second year scored 20.37% above the 18.43% score of the first-year students.

Table 1:- Table showing the percentage scores of the student on cooking skills.

Cooking skills	N	%
High cooking skills	63	61.11%
Low cooking skills	34	32.98%

Table 2:- Table showing the percentage scores of the student on cooking skills according to years of study.

year of study	N	%
year 4	32	31.04%
year 3	25	24.25%
year 2	21	20.37%
year 1	19	18.43%

Discussion:-

the present study assessed students' cooking skills in colleges of education in southeast Nigeria. Ninety-seven students enrolled in the home economics department were recruited for the study. An analysis of their response to the survey instrument demonstrates that the majority of the respondents have high cooking skills (61.11%). This means that a significant number of the students enrolled in the home economics departments are confident in their cooking skills. This finding may be attributed to the teacher's pedagogical input and student's learning adaptation. Similarly, Hansen et al. (2019) reported that students who considered cooking classes necessary displayed cooking confidence, developed extra non-cooking-related skills, and valued the courses. This assertion presupposes that the students who showed high cooking skills committed more attention to cooking classes and probably were motivated to increase their cooking skills. In other words, those who showed low cooking skills (32.98%) could be lagging in cooking motivation and inattentiveness to cooking classes. Thus, the finding provides insight into the variations in cooking skills among home economics students in the colleges of education.

Furthermore, the result revealed that cooking skills in the home economics department increased by the year of study. Students in the early years of study possessed the lowest cooking skills (18.43%), indicating that at their stage, theoretical and practical application of cooking had not been imparted to them. Notably, many students in the first years are naive but become more experienced as they progress. It seems that cooking skills increase as the students advance in academic years. From table 2 above, it was found that the cooking skills increased from year 1 (18.43%) to (31.04%) in the final years. This revelation entails that cooking skills are developed in relation to practical and theoretical exposure. In particular, schools with adequate home economics infrastructures were more likely to impart culinary skills to students positively. However, teachers' contributions relative to the cooking acquisition have been applauded in literature (Granberg et al., 2017).

Cooking practices in home economics in colleges of education are essential for a student's personal development. Students who develop adequate culinary skills and nutritional knowledge are more likely to make healthier food

choices in later life. Students take on these acquired skills through to adulthood. Evidence suggests that increased nutritional awareness and cooking skills ability helps individuals make effective dietary choices. This calls for the need to further invest in evaluating school-based cooking programs, potentially using a standardized, tested tool for cooking skills assessment.

Conclusion:-

The study assessed students' cooking skills in home economics in colleges of education in southeast Nigeria. It was found that most of the students possess high cooking skills. More so, it was revealed that the student's cooking skills varied based on their level of study. It is concluded that home economics provides the requisite opportunity for developing cooking skills. The findings from the study have implications for increased enrollment in home economics and effective implementation of policies geared towards the development of home economics in the colleges of education in southeast Nigeria. Indeed, the self-reported cooking skills and the cross-sectional design limit the result generalization. Future research should adopt multiple measurements to curtail bias reporting and employ an experimental approach to establish cause-effect relationships. However, the result of the study provides relevant data for creating awareness and improving perception towards home economics education in Nigeria.

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