

CURRICULUM CHANGE IN HOME ECONOMICS EDUCATION AT GWERU TEACHERS COLLEGE, ZIMBABWE, 1975-1995

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This study will enrich the historical base of home economics education in Zimbabwe and document the curricular changes and contextual factors influencing the home economics teacher training program at Gweru Teachers College in Zimbabwe, between 1975 and 1995. Data were collected through documents that were supported by in-depth interviews. Former Gweru home economics lecturers and students were interviewed, and current lecturers participated in a focus group. Structural and administrative changes were found to be more fundamental than conceptual changes. Political and economic crises prompted program changes more than professional concerns for the subject.

Zimbabwe is a former British colony gaining political independence in 1980. The quality and provision of education has been central to the politics of the country since the introduction of the first Western school in 1859. Both the colonial government and the successive Black government each had their own vision of education in Zimbabwe. Most African programs have been characterized by irrelevant professional practice, curriculum that is highly foreign and does not take into account African developmental needs and problems, a lack of critical thinking, and lack of qualified personnel at all levels (HEAA, 1996; Waudo, 1993). The purpose of this study was to investigate the contextual factors which shaped home economics education at Gweru Teachers College in Zimbabwe.

Literature Review

Home economics as a field of study has its origin in the United States of America. According to McGrath and Johnson (1968), the first record of a course in home economics came from Iowa State College in 1869. The primary purpose of the course was to prepare women for work in the home. On the African continent, home economics programs were largely imported by European missionaries (Atkinson, 1972; Kwawu, 1993; Molokwu, 1990; Owalabi et al., 1991; Waudo, 1993). Thus, the beginnings of home economics in the Americas during the middle nineteenth century to early twentieth century coincided with the Scramble for Africa (period when European countries competed to colonize African countries). The trend and pace for home economics and other educational programs were, therefore, set by Christian missionaries.

In Zimbabwe, for example, Christian missionaries opened the first Western-type school in 1859. Initially, their aim was to introduce Christianity (Mungazi, 1990, 1998), but they soon introduced academics. The earliest policy statement issued in 1899 spoke of providing Africans with "systematic training in household work or agriculture" (Atkinson, 1972, p. 90). The 1907 education ordinance prescribed "domestic work" (p. 90) for girls as one aspect of industrial

training so Africans could cope with, and improve village conditions. Domestic work included cookery, laundry, sewing, first aid, and housekeeping.

Curricula known as 'education for village industries' was introduced between 1918 and 1922 (Mungazi, 1990). Blacks were taught hand crafts such as basket making, chair making, poultry keeping, and tilework. This innovation was short lived because Blacks demanded an academic education similar to the education of White children rather than education directed towards the production of crafts.

From 1927 to 1935, administrative personnel emphasized community development programs such as maternity care, child welfare, irrigation, health, and agricultural improvement (Mungazi, 1990; Parker, 1960). However, due to the effects of the depression, coupled with the hostility of the chief Native Commissioner who was against Black advancement, the program soon folded (Parker, 1960).

The 1940s and 1950s saw girls and women being trained for homemaking and employment in textile mills and clothing factories. Because of economic growth after the Second World War, Blacks moved into town necessitating the opening of more schools (Kuster, 1994). In the late 1960s and 1970s Blacks increasingly questioned imbalances between education for Whites and education for Blacks, such as limited access to educational opportunities and the uneven distribution of educational resources including teachers (Nhundu, 1989).

In 1980 Zimbabwe gained independence from Britain and immediately began the task of redressing colonial imbalances and grievances of the Black population. Educational opportunities were democratized and racial education abolished. Several administrative and structural changes were made to education as a whole. The nature of these changes as they relate to home economics education and how they affected its development, are included in this study.

Methodology

Research Design

Historical methods were used to determine the contextual factors which shaped the home economics education program at Gweru Teachers College (GTC). The home economics program at Gweru Teachers College was chosen among home economics programs offered in fifteen teacher training institutions since it had been in existence the longest, and was the largest producer of secondary school teachers.

Data Collection

Data for the study were collected through an analysis of historical documents such as Department of Teacher Education Reports on Colleges, course syllabi, examinations, external assessors and examiners' reports, various forms of correspondence, student enrollment data, college pass lists and records of minutes of the GTC Home Economics Department. These were further supported by in-depth interviews, a focus group, and informal observations. Six former students and two former lecturers of the Home Economics Department at GTC were purposefully selected for interviews by following cues given by other interviewees. Arrangements for interviews were then made by telephone. Students prepared at Gweru were selected from the entire period under study, 1975-1995. Three lecturers who taught in the department for five years or more were selected for participation in a focus group. Interviews were preceded by an initial document search and analysis, and were interlaced with periods of searching, reading, and analyzing documents.

Further triangulation of data was provided using primary data sources such as teacher education reports on colleges, departmental course syllabi, external examiners' reports, various forms of correspondence, college pass lists, and records of departmental meetings. Content validity was achieved by using primary data sources and consulting experts in historical research, teacher education, and home economics.

Data Analysis

The data were divided into four time periods—1975 to 1980, 1980 to 1985, 1985 to 1990, and 1990 to 1995. The boundaries created by the divisions were, however, not definitive since an overlap was possible due to the nature of qualitative data. All interviews were taped and transcribed with analysis ongoing. The following topics were explored in the data and are reported below: program structure, enrollment history, curriculum, and contextual factors.

Findings and Discussion

Program Structure

The structure of the home economics education program evolved from a two-year program before 1975, to a three year program during the period 1975-1982, and then to a four year program from 1983 to 1990. Between 1988 and 1995 the curriculum was again revised and returned to a three year program. Two programs ran concurrently between 1988-1995. The four year program was phased out while the three year program began. Each structure had advantages and disadvantages. One lecturer reported, "...during the pre-independence period, [students] were supposed to teach under a qualified teacher, and so get a lot of supervision and guidance, but after independence they were going to face ... a whole class and ... teach a whole year". One student elaborated, "... because our fellow home economics students spend a whole year [on teaching practice], some become very stubborn. They take themselves to be full qualified teachers..." Educational advantages revolved around the need to provide a structure that allowed the professional growth of students. Administrative convenience centered on issues such as enrollment, deployment of students while on teaching practice, frequency and quality of supervision, accommodation during residential periods, provision of teaching/learning resources, and certification of students. According to Kapfunde (1997), sometimes policy decisions are based more on political considerations than on professional considerations.

Enrollment

In the early 1980s, Zimbabwe needed to alleviate the chronic shortage of teachers caused by rapid expansion and increased enrollments in both primary and secondary education. At that time, focus of home economics programs shifted from training homemakers for village and communal life to training teachers for the education system.

In 1988, there were 42 graduating students but by 1993 the numbers had almost doubled with 80 graduating students. Similarly, the number of lecturing staff varied between six in 1989 and eleven in 1990 and 1991.

Traditional gender stereotypes associated with home economics were broken in 1995, with 15 male students enrolled in the program, two graduates, and one male lecturer. One lecturer recalled earlier times, "Oh, in those days ... we never had male students. It was kind of taboo to get male students." A higher enrollment of male students may have been caused by a greater focus on teaching skills which would have greater economic potential.

Curriculum Error! Bookmark not defined.

Before 1980 all courses received equal emphasis. The structure of the program allowed generous time allocation for all aspects and the program provided a rich environment of needed resources. A former student reported, “At that time [late 1970s] ... the classrooms were well equipped. We had enough stoves, enough sewing machines and the [classes] were not very large. ... We had our own library ... although some of the books were a bit outdated”

In the early 1980s, the concept of major and minor subjects, where students spent more time taking courses in their major area of study, was introduced. Two majors/minors were created namely ‘foods, nutrition and home management’, or ‘clothing furnishings and fabric care’ (GTC, 1982). From the mid-1980s to 1995 the program reverted to a generalist approach placing equal emphasis on all areas (TERC, 1986). Students who trained during this period were less confident about their ability to teach, unlike those who trained earlier and felt they were overqualified. The amount of time allocated to a subject per week dropped from nine hours in 1978 to four-and-a-half hours in the 1990s. The limited amount of time devoted to teaching each of the subject components, coupled with generally depleted resources in the 1990s, may have had a negative impact on the quality of teacher produced.

During the late 1970s, skills acquired in home economics were needed in order to improve the health and living conditions of the individual and their community. The Institute of Education (1981, p. 1) recommended that “ ... more time allocation [be given] to the nutrition content in the course; an area of vital importance in national development.” Home economists were needed in order to return to their communities and teach healthy habits (Mungazi, 1990).

In early to mid 1980s because of the shift from training homemakers for village and communal life to training teachers for the education system, the curriculum focus changed. The government realized students needed skills not just for the home and classroom, but for the job market. Student teachers were supposed to learn practical skills which they would impart to secondary school students so they could get jobs in industry or other formal sectors of the economy. Hence, self-reliance and income generation activities were stressed (Nhundu, 1997).

In the 1990s, the focus on job skills continued, with an added dimension of being able to create jobs. Upon completion of secondary school, the majority of graduates found themselves with no available jobs. Therefore, students were expected to acquire skills which could be used to start businesses and employ others.

An examination of departmental syllabi for changes in subject matter revealed changes in course names (see Table 1). There was little change in content, a view that was vividly presented by one focus group participant: “Our courses have always had this emphasis on home management, fashion and fabrics, food and nutrition, and ... applied education or methodology. We still have them as they form the core of our courses here.” The respondent continued by describing the existence of a “hidden curriculum” where knowledge was carved into different subject areas without causing visible, documented evidence of changes in subject matter. According to Cuban (1997), when such change happens, it is termed *incremental* change rather than *fundamental* change. Incremental change occurs when new ideas, new topics, and new teaching strategies are introduced but the subject areas remain the same.

Table 1
Subject Content Areas Emphasized: 1975-1995

Period	Subject Content Areas
1975-1980	(I) Housecraft (ii) Needlework and dressmaking (iii) Cookery (iv) Gardening and small livestock (v) Physiology and hygiene (vi) First aid (vii) Project (viii) Methodology (of teaching home economics)
1980-1985	(I) Foods, nutrition and home management (ii) Clothing, furnishing and fabric care (one of the above taken as major subject, the other one as a minor subject) (iii) Applied education [methodology] (vi) Enriching or broadening component*
1985-1990	(I) Foods and nutrition (ii) Home management (iii) Fashion and fabrics (iv) Family and child studies (v) Applied education [methodology] (vi) Project (compulsory)
1990-1995	(I) Foods and nutrition (ii) Home management (iii) Fashion and fabrics (iv) Methods of teaching (applied education) (v) Project (compulsory)

*Enriching and Broadening component: Equivalent of the project that was intended to give students the opportunity for research and in-depth study on topics of their own choice and interest

Both interviews and departmental syllabi provided information about the program's pedagogical shifts. The following expressions, taken from interviews and other documentation, give a glimpse of the quality of teaching and learning experiences prevailing at any given time. weak methodology and an artificial environment under which some students trained. When asked for any weakness of the program they trained in, one of the students replied :

. . . that program was very enriching but what I thought was weak was the methodology. They were not really looking at the practical problems, trying to solve them with the resources that you would sort of find when you go out to teach. . . . it was a bit artificial . . . it wasn't the same sort of environment we were experiencing. So you would have to adjust to suit the needs of that immediate environment.

- program's inability to prepare students to adapt to various situations or environments. Teachers who taught in rural schools believed that their schools were disadvantaged mainly because of lack of resources. One of them reported:

I am teaching in a rural area. The equipment is not sufficient and we have many problems with the headmasters [school principals]. . . . they tell you that they don't have the money, . . . And when we are assessed at regional level, they compare us with other schools which have got everything. So it's a little bit unfair.

- inadequate resources (including human resources) therefore, inadequate practice. When asked for any differences between how they were taught and how they were teaching, one of the student interviewees responded:

Because resources are sort of very much limited now, and our students cannot be exposed to as much variety of resources like what we had at GTC. The rooms are too crowded now and its very difficult to deal with students at personal level.

Another concurred:

. . . some of the expectations we have cannot be met because we don't have the resources. . . . Our programs have for many years been starved of the proper skills that are required for the next millennium. I think our home economics programs have got constraints, . . . constraints of the required resources, constraints of staff .

- inadequate time, therefore, rushed through the program. One lecturer interviewee who taught in the early 1980's commented:

The weakness was rush . . . and the numbers. We started getting very thin on resources . . . and our human resources were not well baked [quality of teachers produced was questionable] because we were rushing to satisfy the demand that was out there.

- large student numbers causing constraints on equipment. A student who trained in the late 1970s recalled, "At that time . . . the classrooms were good because they were well equipped . . . the [student] groups were not very large. They were small and you were able to use those facilities without crowding". In contrast, one lecturer who was teaching in the college at the time data was collected observed that "The rooms are too crowded and its very difficult to deal with students at personal level."

- need to change teaching approaches. One lecturer who was asked to comment about the differences in teaching strategies commented:

The teaching before independence was to make the school efficient, or just a teacher where you don't question anything, you don't explore anything. Follow a recipe like that, don't change it, and you saw this like this and that is what you are going to do But now when we teach its like we have different situations in the schools. . . .

Another lecturer observed:

We have also sold to the students the outreach program, where we take the people from the community and teach them skills like jam-making. We expect that when the students go to their schools they will also help with such programs.

One student interviewee also explained that: “I feel the home economist of today should be more critical . . . and focus on the needs of today. It’s really important that they even make an analysis of what they teach . . .”. Further, the Institute of Education (1981, p. 1) observed:

... a new approach and emphasis is needed, the needs of the members of families in Zimbabwe studied, and how to meet these needs considered. Greater emphasis should be given to principles and less time and energy on mastering every skill.

Demonstration and lecture methods, however, continued to be popular into the 1990s. An external examiner in 1994 observed that the program had, over the years, emphasized *production* at the expense of problem solving (GTC, 1994). Similar observations were echoed by interviewees who spoke of the need to expose teacher trainees to real life situations where they are required to solve day-to-day problems.

Overall, earlier programs appear to have provided richer, well funded, and more meaningful, life-long learning experiences for students. All students who trained between 1975 and 1985 were happy with their training. They believed they were better prepared to teach than those who trained later. The quality of the learning experiences seems to have dropped somewhat due to a number of factors. First, large numbers of students were admitted without a corresponding increase in lecturing staff. Second, there were depleting resources in proportion to the escalating number of students. Third, outdated and malfunctioning equipment was not replaced. Fourth, there was low morale among lecturing staff due to the above administrative problems (GTC, 1991a, 1991b & 1996). Thus, between 1985 and 1995, the program at GTC lacked both the qualitative and quantitative support factors for the effective implementation of the program.

Contextual Factors Influencing Home Economics Education

A summary of contextual factors, their influence on the aims of education, and changes in the GTC Home Economics Program are presented in Table 2. Because of many political hostilities and uncertainties characterizing the 1970s, and possibilities of a change in government in the late 1970s, changes were initiated in teacher education as a whole (GTC, 1975). Teacher education changed from a two-year program to a three-year concurrent program, and then to a four-year program to accommodate current thinking and needs of different governments. In order to make education more accessible, more relevant, and curb the unemployment problem, a new initiative focusing on skills training was introduced. Both the structure and subject matter of home economics education at GTC should have reflected a curriculum that was career-focused, but available documents did not show this trend. Instead, a new program which was vocationally oriented, the National Foundations Course, was introduced at a different teacher training college. Thus, two kinds of home economics teachers were produced in the country, a vocationally oriented teacher and a traditional home economics teacher.

Table 2

Summary of Contextual Factors in Relation to Broad Aims of Education and Changes in the GTC Home Economics Program

Period	Contextual Factors	Broad Aims of Education	Impact on GTC Home Economics	Outcome of Program Changes
Before 1980	Colonial government Racially divided policies in all sectors Economic stagnation Differentiated curriculum based on race and abilities Education tied to community development Restrictions based on age, fees screening, etc African education not compulsory.	Need to contain African advancement	Produce homemakers and community educators Emphasize skills training, theoretical underpinnings not emphasized No specialization- all subject components compulsory	Negative attitude toward technical education due to political connotations Highly skilled personnel, but no theoretical understanding of subject matter.
1980-1985	Attainment of political independence Democratize educational opportunities Increased access to education at all levels Removal of barriers/restrictions in education and employment Increased parental and community involvement	Need for education and literacy	Increase enrollment Focus on producing teachers for the classroom 4-year program Indegenize curriculum Major/minor options though flexibility is encouraged	High output of teachers Strain on resources Name changes of courses Rising concerns about the quality of teachers produced
1985-1995	Rising unemployment Eroding economy Vocationalize school curricula Increased consultations with industrialists and other stakeholders Increased parental involvement	Need for jobs	Add new knowledge and skills Encourage self-reliance and income generation activities Develop entrepreneurship skills Re-introduce 3-year program	Overloaded curriculum However, no impact on course organization Lecturers need staff development Teachers produced no longer as proficient in skills

Note. The period 1985-1990 has been combined with 1990-1995 since the contextual factors remained basically the same.

Focus group participants indicated focusing on skills training alone was not enough because Zimbabwe needed a more “beefed-up” teacher in the 1990s, one who had both technical skills and awareness of environmental issues. They spoke of the need to diversify current programs, have community outreach and extension programs, and have students become aware of their immediate environment, the community, the country, and the world. Such programs, especially those that advocated community connections, were evident in the 1970s but were rejected by the Black people because of racial overtones. The programs seemed to disappear in the 1980s but re-emerged in the 1990s. What caused the resurfacing of “old ideas?” The late 1970s were marked by increased hostility among racial groups, high unemployment, and

unstable family structures due to people leaving their homes to join the war of liberation. In the 1990s, unemployment reached unprecedented highs and most families struggled for economic survival. Socially, family stability and values were challenged in the midst of the AIDS epidemic and continued influence of the West. Focus group participants strongly felt these issues should be addressed in the program.

Conclusions

It is evident that changes in the program were closely tied to the prevailing political conditions during that time period. The government in power influenced the structure of the program, the available resources, and the type of teacher produced. There was no documented evidence that directly linked major or fundamental change to the professionals. Lecturers spoke of “internal changes” and “changes in the environment” as the forces that had induced them to change but such reports were not documented. The general framework of change was provided by government, and the role of professionals, the lecturers, was limited to the implementation level. However, implementation was not always completed as it was intended. One of the focus group participants was concerned that lack of representation at the policy making level was one of the many problems besieging home economics. So, for change to have meaning and the desired impact, it requires the active participation of those involved at the decision making and implementation levels.

While goals were clearly formulated at the government level, the means of realizing them through curriculum appeared not to have been adequately articulated. The resource base of the department, both material and human, actually dwindled. Effective supervisory structures that would ensure that changes were implemented were not put in place. In other words, it was left to the lecturers to decide whether or not to change.

The findings also raised fundamental questions about how, and if, real changes occur in the nature, scope and practice of home economics education programs worldwide. Some ideologies may resist change. Issues about the welfare of people re-emerged as major concerns in the 1990s. Although in most developing countries such concerns focus on economic needs, they also need to address building a ‘total’ human being, an individual aware of the larger environment in which they live, and who can rectify societal concerns. Suggestions for outreach programs which make use of available technology were encouraged as a way to reach people in the community. For the developing world, this means relying on radio broadcasts, home visits and print media to reach marginalized populations.

Changes in the subject matter created newer demands and expectations of home economics educators. This ever-expanding content presents challenges to teacher education programs. While home economics grows, it becomes more difficult to accommodate new knowledge within college curricula. Change, therefore, is critical. Some knowledge should be removed or revised to make way for new knowledge.

The debate on the goals of education has been a perennial problem throughout history. According to Labaree (1997), educational goals of a society are often conflicting. Potential goals are: democratic equality (focusing on preparing citizens), social efficiency (focusing on training workers), and social mobility (preparing individuals to compete for social positions). While social mobility dominates American education, social efficiency is paramount in Zimbabwean education. Labaree (1997) further noted that politics, more than organizational, pedagogical, social, or cultural concerns, steer reforms in education, a finding which is supported in Zimbabwe.

Educational history in Zimbabwe is not unlike educational history in the United States. While the context is different, political factors also influence American education. While this study has centered on programs in Zimbabwe, one can't help but begin to draw parallels between home economics education in Zimbabwe and family and consumer sciences education programs in the United States during this time period in history. What contextual factors have influenced programs in the United States? Documenting and identifying these factors will help us better understand our past and how these factors impact our future. As governments and educational institutions contemplate their vision of education for the new millennium, it is important that whatever goals are targeted, they should be a result of extensive deliberations of *all* stakeholders who have an interest in education.

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