



Teachers' Perception of Senior Secondary Three Home Economics Students' Soft Skills and their Career Development for Family Sustainability in Owerri Education Zone

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of soft skills on senior secondary school III students in Home Economics in career development for family sustainability. The design of the study was a descriptive survey. The area of the study was Owerri education zone of Imo state with a population of 40 Home Economics teachers. A purposive sampling technique was used for the study in which the 40 teachers were selected due to fewness of the population using census techniques. The instrument for data collection was researchers' made questionnaire titled; Teachers' Perception of Soft Skills on Career Development for Family Sustainability Questionnaire (TPSSCDFSQ), with a 34 question items using four-point modified Likert scale response options of Very High Extent(VHE), High Extent(HE), Low Extent(LE), Very Low Extent(VLE) which weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was validated by an expert in Measurement and Evaluation and two experts in Home Economics curriculum. The instrument had a reliability index of 0.78 using Cronbach Alpha reliability method. Data collected were statistically analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Findings of the study revealed that, soft skills impact positively on the students, by enhancing their career development in Home Economics, it also revealed other challenges that hinder students imbibing soft skills, and solutions were proffered. Recommendations were made such as students linear development should be monitored for proper directives hinged on the needed soft skills.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Family Sustainability, Impact, Secondary Education, Career Development.

Introduction:

Family is the nucleus of every society. As the nucleus of the society every informal education/training starts from there. Acquisition of skills, and competences needed to sustain the ever changing family dynamics starts from the family. Hence, students learning in soft skills acquisition for lifelong learning and workplace become eminent. Acquisition of only technical skills is no longer sufficient for survival in the present digitalized economy for sustainable family living. The need to teach and involve students to acquire and live with soft skills in addition to professional and scientific skills seems critical for personal and professional success in education for sustainability.

Education is the most vital tool for national development. It entails the training and acquisition of useful skills, knowledge, attitudes and values needed by an individual to be responsible and productive in contributing his or her quota to the growth and development of the society in which he/she lives. If we are to talk about families' economic growth and sustenance, some essential life skills that support personal attributes for survival through soft skills becomes imperative. In our society today, most families can no longer provide their children with the necessary skills acquisition needed to face numerous challenging facets of the economy which predisposes the child to many multifaceted social, economic, educational and religious challenges of the world. In the contemporary society as cited by (Njoku, 2023) the economic well-being of most families are challenged by factors such as lack of employment, lack of empowerment, finance, education, external influences, divorce, poor family values, poor home management skills, social problems to mention but a few. To ameliorate the challenges, emphasis as observed by teachers/educators on acquisition of soft skills at the secondary education level becomes inevitable.

Soft skills can be referred as a combination of self- management skills, communication skills, leadership skills and interpersonal skills (kirti & Nisha, 2018). kirti & Nisha, (2018) further asserted that, self-management skills are the abilities regarding one's own thoughts, attitudes, perception and emotions which play a significant role at work place. Student's ability to acquire the needed skills at the secondary education level is a gateway to a successful career development which will enhance their integration into the ever changing society in which they operate. Soft skills are personal qualities, habits and social attributes that enable individuals to work well with others, communicate effectively, and adapts to changing circumstances (Damian, 2023). They are often referred to as essential skills, inter-personal and non-cognitive skills. Soft skills are non-technical abilities that include communication, leadership, teamwork, self-awareness, empathy and emotional intelligence (Khattak & Rehman, 2014).

With adequate acquisition of the relevant soft skills, students at the SSS III class will be meaningfully engaged in a suitable organization which tries to look out for skilled and employable manpower for the changing needs of the job specifications, and manage critical situations that come

Teachers' Perception of Senior Secondary Three Home Economics Students' Soft Skills

with the job effectively and efficiently in a diverse environment. Such skills include, mentoring, self-awareness, communication skills, collaboration, critical, creative, time management, leadership, optimism, inter – personal skills and discipline. These skills enumerated above are well harnessed during the formative stage of the students, mostly at the secondary education level and this prepares them for potential career choices that lead to individual, family and community sustainability. Soft skills raise workers' marginal productivity and wages Achyuta, Namrata, and Anant (2018).

However, Society's dynamic nature requires a deeper, flexible and practical knowledge of skills, competencies, knowledge and attitudes. This agrees with the views of Koval (2015) in Volkova, Zinukova, Vlasenko and Korobeinikova, (2020) who posited that professional skills become somehow outdated and 'soft skills' remain always relevant. Volkova et. al, (2020) corroborates the relevance of soft skills as essential to have good job opportunities and university curriculum should be focused on developing and mastering them. Agarwal, (2013) in the study of developments and challenges involved in soft skills training in professional colleges, averred that every employee is a representative and ambassador of the company, that is why organizations always welcome those employees who possess soft skills and employability skills. Hence, soft skills complement technical skills for maximum efficiency.

Consequently, in the study of Mardatilla, Budiman, and Tarigan, (2018) on developing soft skills training for salespersons to increase total sales, the finding of the study revealed that more important variables in increasing sales were; presentation skills, communication skills, hard skills, self – confidences, Sales environment and ability to perform a task.

Continuing further, Rahate and Azmi, (2023) investigated, high school students' perception and level of soft skills in Moroccan High schools. The result of the findings revealed that, the majority of high school students aren't aware of the importance of soft skills in the language school students through education technology. Further finding is that students' performance in soft skills is not satisfactory. In the views of (Volkova, et al, 2020) on soft skills, their development and

mastering among post graduate students' majority in professional education of Alfred Noble university, Dnipro, they posit that, soft skills are essential to have good job opportunities and university curriculum should be focused on developing and mastering them. Their findings have that; postgraduate students realize the importance of mastering soft skills to make a successful career.

Corroborating with the above study, Dean and East, (2019) in their work on, soft skills needed for the 21st Century workforce, has it that, technical skills are no longer enough for workers to compete in this highly competitive global work environment. That, employers seek individuals to fill their existing job openings based on the skill level for the position.

Another study by Rao, (2014) on enhancing employability in engineering and management students through soft skills, the result suggested that there must be effective coordination among faculty, students, industry and directors of educational institutions for enhancing employability skills in students.

In a related study by Christina and Minerva, (2019) on soft skill development for employability: A case study of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) graduate students at a Vietnamese transnational university, the findings revealed that faculty utilized classroom based practices to provide students the opportunity to enhance soft skills that are perceived to contribute to employability, such as skills related to independent work, interpersonal relationships and the ability to work in global context. It further revealed that interacting with international faculty played a larger part in providing students the opportunity to develop their independent skills, critical thinking, communication and cultural competence.

The ability to communicate is an integral skill for works Dean and East, (2019). Individuals who lack interpersonal skills are more likely to be involved in interpersonal conflict Moeller, Robinson, Wilkowski and Hanson, (2012). Furthermore, listening skills has a role to play in the communication process. For a free flow of communication, an individual must focus on learning what another individual is saying.

Teachers' Perception of Senior Secondary Three Home Economics Students' Soft Skills

Dane-staple, (2022) asserted that, research serving employers indicated that they seek graduates with three broad types of skill: applied knowledge skills, effective relationship abilities, and workplace. Again, that current employers are finding recent college graduates lacking in communication, interpersonal and thinking skills. Dane-staple maintained that, for a better service, sport and management students, faculty, need to design opportunities to help students develop deep desired skills.

In a research by Oluwalola, (2021) on soft skills required of business education graduates, perception of students and lecturers of college of education in Oyo state. The study revealed that there is a widespread perception among students and lecturers that soft skills are a crucial requirement for graduate of business education programme.

Statement of the problem

An observation of students at the secondary education level reveals that barely all the students at the Upper Basic and Post Basic levels lack the essential character and proficient skills which makes it difficult for them to fit well into the menial wealth creating trades that could improve their productivity and survival. Many of them cannot help in the family needs to boost livelihood especially when they cannot proceed to tertiary level. This results to unemployment, starvation, truancy, prostitution, kidnaping and other vices. Lack of proficiency in relevant soft skills especially among the secondary school students at this level makes them redundant and unproductive in meaningful activities that create wealth for family sustainable living. The lack of these essential skills and training makes it difficult for the students to prepare for future occupations, and make successful transition from school to the world of work. This the researchers feel constitutes a gap in career development.

The purpose of the study is to determine;

1. The impact of the soft skills on Senior Secondary School III Students in Home Economics in career development for family sustainability

2. Ways teachers could imbibe in SSS III Home Economics students the soft skills needed for career development.
3. The challenges that could hinder the imbibing of the soft skills in SSS III Home Economics students by the teachers
4. The solutions to the challenging factors in imbibing the soft skills in SSS III home economics students by the teachers.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided the study

1. What extent are the impact of needed soft skills by the senior secondary SSS III school students in career development?
2. What extent are the ways these soft skills could be imbibed in the SSS III Home Economics students?
3. What extent are the challenges that could hinder the imbibing of these soft skills in senior secondary school III students by the teachers?
4. What are the solutions to the challenges in imbibing these soft skills on SSS III Home Economics students?

Research Design and Method

Research Design

The design of the study was descriptive survey, this research design was to enable the researchers have a clearer view and gather more responses from a good number of respondents on the Teachers Perception of Senior Secondary Three Home Economics Students Soft Skills and their Career Development for Family Sustainability in Owerri Education Zone.

Area of the study

The area of the study is Owerri Education Zone of Imo State. This zone is one of the six zones in the state. It is made up of 5 Local Government Areas namely: Ikeduru, Mbaitolu, Owerri Municipal, Owerri North and Owerri West.

Population of the study

The population of the study comprised all the Home Economics teachers in the Senior Secondary Schools of Owerri education zone .

Sample of the study

Using census technique of sampling, a sample of 40 teachers which was the entire population of the study was used for the study due to its smallness.

Instrument for data collection

Instrument for data collection was a researchers' made structured questionnaire titled Teachers Perception of Senior Secondary Home Economics Students Soft Skills Career Development Family Sustainability Questionnaire (TPSSCDFSQ) and it is researchers' made, with a 34 question items using four-point modified Likert scale response options of Very High Extent(VHE), High Extent(HE), Low Extent(LE), Very Low Extent(VLE) which weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was validated by an expert in Measurement and Evaluation and two experts in Home Economics curriculum.

Method of Data collection

Thirty-four question items were used to collect data for the study with a reliability index of 0.78, using Cronbach alpha reliability method.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were statically analyzed using mean and Standard Deviation. Any question item with a mean rating of 2.50 and above was accepted, while any item below 2.50 was rejected.

Result and Discussion

Table 1, revealed that, the response mean of 2.88 is higher than the bench mark mean of 2.5. Again, the total response mean is more than 2/5 of standard deviation of .753 This is an indication that the responses of the respondents in respect to the extent of the impact of soft skills on SSS III students in career development is tilted toward positive direction. By implication, this result shows that soft skills are very vital in the students' career development and cannot be ignored. Result in table 2 revealed a higher response mean of 2.76. this indicates

that, there are ways through which soft skill could be imbibed in the student for a positive result at a high extent. The SD deviation of .732 also shows a positive result.

Table 1: Extent of the impact of soft skill on senior secondary school students III Home Economics in career development

S/N	ITEMS	Mean \bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	How important do you think soft skills are for secondary school students in their career development	3.02	0.81	High Extent
2	Which soft skill do you believe are most relevant for secondary school students to acquire	2.71	0.55	High Extent
3	Soft skills impact behavioural changes in students and their performances	2.92	0.85	High Extent
4	What level of benefits do students have in their future careers by imbibing soft skills	3.00	0.87	High Extent
5	Soft skills could be part of senior secondary school Curriculum for a better career development.	2.80	0.70	High Extent
6	Soft skills promote positive school environment and students' relationships	3.03	0.90	High Extent
7	Soft skills should be infused at all levels of education during curriculum planning and development.	2.75	0.65	High Extent
8	Soft skills provide ample opportunities for students' rediscovery of their career choices	2.81	0.70	High Extent
	Mean =	2.88	.753	High Extent

Table 2: Extent of the way Home Economics teachers could imbibe soft skill in SSS III home economics students for career development.

S/N	ITEMS	Mean \bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Teachers are very much aware about soft skills and it's important to the students on career development.	2.2	0.6	Low Extent
2	Teachers organize team-based projects to enhance Soft skills .	2.7	0.79	High Extent
3	Learner oriented methods of teaching can be effective in teaching and fostering soft skills in the students	2.9	0.78	High Extent
4	Teachers play vital roles in promoting the development of soft skills in students – (good communication skills, discipline, inter personal and self-esteem) and others	3.0	0.81	High Extent
5	Engaging students in extra-curriculum activities can contribute to the enhancement of soft skills.	2.8	0.66	High Extent
6	A good family support system can have a great influence on soft skills development	2.7	0.61	High Extent
7	Peer interaction help students acquire and practice soft skills	2.6	0.81	High Extent
8	Adequate resources such as electronic media and other tools could be of immense importance facilitating soft skills acquisition by the students.	2.8	0.8	High Extent
	Mean=	2.76	.73	High Extent

Table 3, revealed the mean response of the extent of the challenges that could hinder the imbibing of soft skills in SSS home economics III students. The result indicated that two (2) out of the 10 listed items fell below the mean range of 2.3 – 2.5. which stand at a low extent, while

8 listed contents fell within the mean range 2.5 – 3.0. which indicates a high extent. This implies that there are many challenges in imbibing soft skills in the students.

Table 3: Extent of challenges that could hinder the imbibing of soft skill SSS III home economics for career development by teachers

S/N	ITEMS	Mean \bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Inadequate utilization of soft skill by the teachers	2.5	0.45	High Extent
2	Inadequate preparation of students on soft skills for career development	2.7	0.62	High Extent
3	Inadequate knowledge of soft skills prior to the introduction and utilization by the students	2.8	0.6	High Extent
4	The Introduction of interpersonal skills as a domain in education poses a problem on the students acceptability of soft skills	2.6	0.52	High Extent
5	Lack of manpower and resources by the school Is a challenges	2.3	0.31	Low Extent
6	Use inadequate teaching method hinder the acquisition of soft skills by the students	2.9	0.83	High Extent
7	Non – training /retraining teachers on the need for soft skills in enhancing career development in the students	2.8	0.81	High Extent
8	Parents and other stakeholder in Education have a clandestine attitude in the students career development	2.3	0.40	Low Extent
9	Non integration of soft skills in the school curriculum for the students' career develop	2.6	0.60	High Extent
10	Non-involvement of the community in developing soft skills in the students. For enhancing career development.	3.00	0.81	High Extent
	Mean =	2.7	.61	High Extent

Table 4: Solution to the challenges in Imbibing Soft skills on Secondary school students by home economics teachers

S/N	ITEMS	Mean \bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Teachers should be made aware of the utilization of soft skills in enhancing students career development	2.7	0.81	High Extent
2	The curriculum should be modified to suit the needs of soft skills by the students	2.8	0.81	High Extent
3	Teachers should be provided with the opportunities of retraining on impacting soft skills in the student	2.8	0.81	High Extent
4	Parents and guardians should be acquainted with soft skills needed by students for career development	2.6	0.82	High Extent
5	Extracurricular programmes that will enhance soft skills should be introduced and implemented in schools	2.8	0.61	High Extent
6	Learning resources and tools that are essential for promoting the acquisition of soft skills should be utilized by the teachers	2.9	0.82	High Extent
7	Communities should be made to undertake some important roles on fostering the acquisition of soft skills in the students	2.7	0.67	High Extent
8	Innovative teaching methods should be included by teachers during teaching and learning for the enhancement of soft skills.	3.0	0.81	High Extent
	Grand Mean =	2.7	.77	High Extent

Result on table 4 revealed the mean responses of the extent of solutions to the challenges of imbining soft skills in the learners for career development. The result shows a mean range of 2.7 which is above the mean range of 2.5 which is a high extent. This indicates that, there are positive chances of finding solutions to the challenges for better career development of the students.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that soft skills affect greatly senior secondary school III students in Home Economics in their career development, with some major challenges to include; inadequate awareness of proper soft skills for the students and inadequate teaching methods. This is not surprising, for the fact that, there is a high rate of unemployment in the society. Industries and the job market need competent workforce who has the capability of problem solving, communicates freely, interact with others in any establishment, think and work critically as a team. However, if there is adequate acquisition of the needed soft skills such as, communication, discipline, interpersonal, enthusiasm, optimism, time management and leadership skills, students will be greatly equipped during and after their secondary education and will be fitted into the job market.

The findings of this study agrees with that of (Volkova et al, 2020) who asserts the relevance of soft skills as essential to have good job opportunities and university curriculum should be focused on developing and mastering them. Corroborating further, Agarwal, (2013), maintained that, organizations always welcome those employees who possess soft skills and employability skills, hence, soft skills complements technical skills for maximum efficiency. The views of Rahate and Azmi, (2023) agreed with Volka et al,(2020) research findings that the majority of high school students aren't aware of the importance of soft skills and the students' performance in soft skills is not satisfactory. This finding is in line with that of Dane-staple, (2022) who revealed in the study that employers seek graduates with three broad types of skills; applied knowledge, affective relationship abilities and workplace, that current employers are finding recent college graduates lacking in communication, interpersonal and thinking skills.

Teachers' Perception of Senior Secondary Three Home Economics Students' Soft Skills

In contrast to the study, (Oluwalola, 2021) has it that, there is a widespread perception among students and lecturers that soft skills are a crucial requirement for graduate of business education programme. Majority of students and lecturers are highly perceived on the required soft skills for graduates of business education and that lecturers had more perception than the students.

Conclusion:

Soft skills among senior secondary school III students in Home Economics in career development is found to be one with some challenges which include, non- teacher awareness of the right teaching methods to be used, inadequate preparation of students on the need and acquisition of soft skills for their career development and non- integration of soft skills in the school curriculum. This poses a huge set back on imbibing the relevant soft skills in the students for their career development. Which prepares them for global job opportunities. However, if the solutions proffered by the respondents are adhered to, career development of the senior secondary school III in Home Economics would be harnessed, they will be in a better employable state, be employers of labour and self-reliant.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made by the researchers.

1. Awareness of the importance of soft skills should be made known to the relevant stakeholders – parents, teachers, students and school management.
2. Students' career development should be monitored for proper directives hinged on the needed soft skills.
3. Innovative teaching methods that promote the acquisition of soft skills should be used by the teachers.
4. Training and retraining of teachers through workshops, seminars and conferences should be a paramount value
5. The communities in which the schools are situated should be involved in harnessing the students' soft skills.

6. Global best practices in technology should be used to harness soft skills in career
7. development of the students.

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