

Assessing Home Economics College Students' Behaviour towards Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Home Economics education strengthens families as the primary source of support and nurturing for individuals in a rapidly changing society, leading to sustainable lifestyles for individuals and families. Educational programmes designed for moulding public psychology towards this end are of considerable relevance within developing countries including Pakistan. This study was conducted to find out whether students of Home Economics colleges were sensitized to the concept of Sustainable Development (SD) through their own curriculum. A survey questionnaire on reported behaviours towards SD was administered to students across six Home Economics colleges in Punjab. The collected data were analysed statistically, using SPSS software (version 15). The findings confirmed that Home Economics college students showed favourable behaviours towards SD. There was no significant difference between the Mean values of SD behaviour among students of different colleges. Therefore, the study suggests that Home Economics curriculum can be a useful tool for moulding public behaviours and promoting sustainable development lifestyles in Pakistan.

Keywords: Home economics, higher education, sustainable development (SD)

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Introduction

It is recognized that education is the only process through which individuals and societies can be empowered to realize their true potentials so as to contribute favourably towards global environment and economies. The correlation between sustainable development and education was presented in the world conference held in 1972 in Stockholm, Sweden (UNCED, 1992). It is possible to mould public attitudes and behaviour to bring about sustainable development through appropriate education. This requires consistency, together with a shared vision and mission. Diversity in activities is the key to success, as the same strategies may not be effective with all the people involved in the mission. Education brings changes in behaviours and equips individuals with necessary skills for living (Hungerford & Volk, 1990). In the context of sustainable development, desirable goals such as reducing the carbon footprint, increasing energy and water efficiency and ensuring healthy living can only be met through educational initiatives that influence behaviour. A household-based approach towards sustainability involves a deeper understanding of human behaviour leading to change processes and innovations in lifestyles. In this way, Home Economics education is geared towards Sustainable Development (SD) as it influences the values, attitudes and behaviours of students through a community development approach.

What is Home Economics?

Home Economics is a century old discipline that first emerged in USA and Canada, to highlight and professionalize the role of women as home managers. Its role has also been well-recognized as an effective drive towards women's inclusion in significant socio-political activities such as voting (Renwick, 2015). As such, the discipline of Home Economics has channelized the hitherto unrecorded efforts of women into mainstream human activities. As a field of education, Home Economics has advanced from teaching household skills alone towards a community development approach, equipping the students with management skills for small and medium entrepreneurship. It strengthens families as the primary source of support in a rapidly changing society, leading to sustainable lifestyles for individuals and families.

Home Economics college education integrates theories and practices in areas of human relationships, responsible consumerism, food and nutrition, clothing, textiles, housing and visual arts. The practicum-based curriculum of Home Economics education is designed to integrate the age-old values of thrift and work efficiency into the lifestyles of the students. Home Economics tackles daily household routines with a professional approach and has developed consistently towards sustainable human communities in the 21st century and beyond (Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T., & Turkki, K. (Eds.) 2012).

Home Economics and Sustainable Development

Home economics education promotes sustainable development by empowering the students through capacity building in decision-making and problem-solving. Home Economics satisfies the fundamental needs of individuals and families by addressing their practical concerns related to everyday life with creative approaches (HEIA, 2010). It gives scientific orientation to household routines while introducing civic responsibilities to families and societies through transformed behavioural norms. The discipline of Home Economics aligns perfectly with three dimensions of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), identified as *Environment; Society and Economy* (Pendergast, 2006). Home Economics students are exposed to sustainable norms and values through experiential learning and ethical consumerism. They gain first-hand experiences in conserving natural and material resources, thus reducing their carbon footprint.

Assessing SD Behaviours

The most accurate assessment of any form of behaviour can only be possible through longitudinal experimental studies. However, such studies involve time and material resources beyond the scope of average educational researchers. Therefore, generally in educational researches with limited resource allocation, the required data is collected through psychologically tested research instruments that are deemed reliable and valid for eliciting accurate responses. Behaviours are very often the product of knowledge, attitudes, values, lifestyles, religion and financial situations. Biel, Eek and Garling (1999) report that attitudes and social norms have a profound effect on behaviours. These findings are endorsed by Halpenny (2010) who confirms a direct reflection of the values and beliefs held by individuals upon their respective behaviours and intentions. Tapia-Fonllem, C., Corral-Verdugo, V., Fraijo-Sing, B., & Duron-Ramos, M. (2013) too, are reported a strong relationship between intent to act, attitude and sustainable behaviour. They have further presented an interconnection within sustainable behaviour. They contend that once people are engaged in any one form of sustainable behaviour, it is likely to lead them to other holistic, supportive and similar behaviour patterns.

Methodology

In order to assess the impact of the Home Economics curriculum on sustainable development, a survey was administered to students of six main colleges of Home Economics in the province of Punjab, Pakistan. The selected colleges offer an identical curriculum for BS in Home Economics, approved by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC). A convenience sample of BS Final year students was selected from each of the six college located in the cities of Islamabad, Faisalabad, Lahore and Multan.

The research instrument titled, "Index of Favourable Behaviours towards Sustainable Development" was developed by the International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD) in Winnipeg, Canada. It was modified for use in Pakistan by the researchers. Certain items (items. 6 and 12) within the instrument were reverse coded to enhance the accuracy of responses. The modified survey instrument is presented as Table1.

Table 1
Items Measuring Behaviour towards SD

S. No.	Items
1	My preference is to go on foot wherever I can and avoid using a vehicle whenever possible.
2	While using water, I consciously try not to waste it.
3	Re-using or recycling of waste material gives me great satisfaction.
4	I constantly seek ways to help people living below poverty line.
5	I feel compelled to put waste material at its proper place of disposal if I find it thrown in a public area.
6	I am not concerned if my actions are harmful to the natural environment.
7	I feel concerned about the widening gap between the haves and have-nots in our society.
8	While disposing kitchen waste, I always try to separate biodegradable material from non- biodegradable materials.
9	I boycott goods from manufacturers who are known to mistreat their workers or do not care about the environment.
10	While buying goods, quality of a product is more important to me in comparison to the appearance.
11	I find it worthwhile to volunteer for charitable organizations or environmental protection agencies.
12	I do not worry much about the impact of my living style on other people close to me.

The respondents were asked to grade each of the 12 statements on a Likert-type scale of 1 to 5. Values 1 and 2 showed positive behaviours towards SD; 3 was considered to be Neutral; 4 and 5 showed negative behaviour towards SD. Some statements were negatively phrased and reverse-coded to add validity to the research instrument.

Findings

The findings showed that regardless of institutional differences, Home Economics students displayed quite favourable behaviours towards sustainable development. The mean values of SD behaviour of students from each of the six colleges ranged from 2 to 2.2 (Table 2) which meant they agreed to the statements that supported SD.

Table 2

Mean Values of SD Behavior of Home Economics Students across Six Colleges in Punjab

S. No	College	Mean	N	SD
1	College of Home Economics, Gulberg-Lahore.	2.19	68	.352
2	FG College of HE & Mgt Sciences, F-7/2 Islamabad.	2.21	35	.440
3	Lahore College for Women University, Lahore.	2.23	33	.456
4	Institute of Home Sciences, Agricultural University, Faisalabad	2.13	40	.431
5	College of Home Economics, Multan	2.17	33	.388
6	Govt. Postgraduate College, Samanabad-Lahore	2.08	25	.303

Table 2 shows the mean values of SD behavior of the students from Home Economics colleges across Punjab. As can be seen, there is no significant difference in mean values of the behavior of students from different colleges.

Discussion

The most serious concerns for human societies across the globe at present are related with environmental, social and economic conditions surrounding them. These three domains have also been identified as the key areas for sustainable development interventions. Higher education in home economics was initiated more than a century ago in the USA and Canada to improve the economic and social status of women. It has developed consistently with a scientific orientation towards conserving human and natural resources. With its unique household-based approach towards problem-solving and decision-making for goal achievement, home economics education has proved to transform lifestyles and behaviors for greater sustainability. In a country like Pakistan, having a large population with a low literacy rate, home economics education provides many possibilities for sustainable development.

Conclusion

The purpose of education is to bring a positive change in the knowledge, attitude and behaviour of individuals, leading to a positive change in societal norms. The closer the educational curriculum is to existing positive norms and practices, the easier it will be to inculcate the concepts of sustainable development. The Home Economics curriculum is

over a century old discipline that inculcates concerns about materialistic lifestyles among the students (Zaidi, 2017). It develops awareness about the hazards of irresponsible consumerism upon the environment, society and the economy. Thus a more efficient and widespread promotion of Home Economics lifestyles can lead to sustainable communities in Pakistan.

Recommendations

Families are the basic units of human societies. The fact that economies would not exist without families and consumers, was acknowledged by the United Nations (UN) in the year 1994, which was declared as the Year of the Family by the UN.

Home Economics education has the potential to strengthen the family structures in Pakistan through education extension programs at the formal and informal levels. However, it is recommended that state of the art infrastructure and badly needed material resources be provided for this unique field of education so that its true impact can be felt across the nation in the minimum possible time.

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