

CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES IN IMPLEMENTING THE FOOD AND NUTRITION CURRICULUM IN LESOTHO SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the challenges in implementing the Food and Nutrition syllabus of the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE), focusing on teacher perspectives regarding school-based assessments (SBAs). Food and Nutrition, a practically oriented subject within Home Economics, enables students to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical activities (Asare & Asare 2023:42). Key areas examined in this article include instructional challenges, oversight of practical activities, and administrative support for resource access.

Using a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach as proposed by Maarouf (2019) and Ponce & Pag'an-Maldonado (2015), the research collected qualitative and quantitative data from 37 randomly selected secondary school teachers in Lesotho, specializing in Food and Nutrition. Data which were gathered through questionnaires and interviews, were analysed using thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data (Creswell & Creswell 2018).

The findings reveal that the extensive LGCSE syllabus, which must be completed in two years, lacks clear guidelines, is overwhelming for teachers and impacting their curriculum decisions. Despite 82% of teachers having significant teaching experience, substandard working conditions hinder their effectiveness. Although 88% of teachers engage students in practical work, monitoring large groups is challenging due to resource constraints, which affects creativity and individual participation. Insufficient resources result in

substandard outcomes and inadequate student preparation, especially for SBAs. The syllabus' breadth, coupled with limited time and other resources, restricts students' opportunities to practice essential skills, significantly impacting their learning experience.

KEYWORDS

curriculum, students, practical subject, food and nutrition, teaching, school-based assessment

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Nutrition curriculum for the General certificate of Secondary Education was developed in 2016. The syllabus of this subject expects learners to gain 'life-long skills'. Developing life-long learners is the key pedagogical approach for LGSCE curriculum (Du Toit 2021:9, 35). The implementation of this practical subject, particularly in Lesotho's secondary schools' education system, presents distinct challenges of which potential solutions will be explored in this study.

BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

Food and Nutrition is a major area of Home Economics, and is a practically oriented aspect of the subject, where skills can be acquired when students are given the opportunity to practice what is taught. Food and Nutrition as a practical subject is essential in preparing students for the occupational challenges they will face after schooling. It does not only provide them with necessary skills for employment in various sectors, but also promotes self-reliance. Furthermore, practical subjects encourage the development of personal abilities and talents, contributing to a well-rounded education that is aligned with the local needs and societal demands (Bhebhe & Nxumalo 2017). The practice, if adequate, can equip learners with relevant skills and knowledge for gainful employment and self-reliance (Olumati 2021:3). The high quality and appropriate practical work in Food and Nutrition is not just central, but also crucial or a key factor in engaging and inspiring students, fostering or stimulating a lifelong interest in Home Economics (Olumati 2021).

The practical work, requires substantial resources such as equipment and ingredients, which are often lacking, thereby challenging the teachers to improvise frequently (MOE 2010). The localized Lesotho Food and

Education in Lesotho is aimed at providing learners with knowledge, skills, ethics, values and attitudes essential to enable them to survive. Basic education in particular, forms the essential foundation for tertiary, technical and vocational education as well as life-long learning. Education aims to prepare individuals by equipping them with relevant knowledge and skills necessary to thrive and be competitive in the global market (MOET 2021:1).

"Practical education is defined as the phase of education which seeks to help the people, students and the populace acquire manipulative skills required in industrial arts or applied sciences" (Bhebhe & Nxumalo 2017:68). The effectiveness of teaching practical subjects is largely influenced by the teachers' qualifications and their ability to motivate students. Teachers must be adequately trained to handle the unique demands of practical subjects, which are critical in stimulating student interest and engagement. Unfortunately, there is often a shortfall in both training and resources, impacting the overall quality of teaching and learning in practical subjects (Bhebhe & Nxumalo 2017:69).

For effective teaching and learning to take place in the school certain factors need to be

put in place, and these include qualified and experienced teachers, adequate teaching materials, adoption of the appropriate teaching methods, as well as co-operation of the students and the school administration (Ndem & Akubue 2016:104). Home Economics also faces the challenge of negative perception from some teachers in other disciplines, who see this subject as a type of cooking course rather than a legitimate discipline. Home Economics teachers at times feel that the subject has less credibility in the eyes of their colleagues who seem to believe that their subjects are much more important. This negative view of Home Economics is believed to undermine the subject's position and its mission to contribute to education for sustainable development (Gisslevik, Werhersson & Larsson 2018:10).

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MOET (2021:vii) defines curriculum as an embodiment of content (knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) pedagogy (methods and strategies) and assessment of a given level or phase. Lesotho initiated a curriculum diversification reform in 1974, aimed at integrating practical subjects like Home Economics into the education system. The goal was to foster self-reliance through "education with production" while maintaining the pathway to further education (Thelejani 1990:25; Raselimo & Mahao 2015:3; MOET 2021).

Despite the inclusion of practical subjects in

the curriculum, a lack of philosophical guidelines persists, which hampers their effective integration. Practical subjects are still viewed as secondary to academic ones, a perception shared by learners, parents, and society at large. This view contributes to the lesser value assigned to practical education, despite its significance in developing employable skills and addressing socio-economic issues such as unemployment and poverty (Thelejani 1990:25; Bhebhe & Nxumalo 2017: 68).

Assessment is defined as a process to determine learners' achievement of expected learning outcomes. It employs a range of methods including written, oral, observation, project and practical work. It is also defined as a wide range of methods that evaluate the performance of students through different types of evaluation activities such as formal testing and examinations, practical and oral assessment, classroom based assessment carried out by teachers and portfolios (Purvin, 2011:7; MOET 2021: vii). Assessment is an activity that involves the gathering of information, and providing feedback on what learners know and can do, with the intention of identifying learning challenges to prompt remediation and reinforcement of good teaching and learning practices. Assessment should help the teacher to diagnose and build learners' experiences to help them make the connection between their experiences and what is being taught in school. The process of assessment should be participative, interactive, constructive, and allow for making judgements so as to assign a grade, marks or some other categorization (Purvin 2011:12; MOET 2021:30).

For school professionals, assessment provides them with information about the effectiveness of their pedagogy and the curriculum material used for learning (G.I. Lingam & N. Lingam 2016:91). Assessment must help improve the quality of teaching and

also assist in preparing students for external high-status assessments. This process must contribute to helping school leaders and teachers monitor the quality of their work, and it must demonstrate to parents and other stakeholders, that high quality education is going on. To do this, teachers require effort, skill and resources (Brown 2011:31-32).

School Based Assessment (SBA) involves collecting data on learner attainment within schools, by the subject teacher, for both formative and summative purposes. It supports teaching and learning by enabling teachers to monitor progress, provide feedback, and grade student work. Teachers play a crucial role in SBA, requiring skills and knowledge to assess students effectively. SBA is designed to equip students with 21st century skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, entrepreneurship, and creativity. Properly implemented, SBA allows for effective monitoring of learner progress, improving teaching and learning quality (Chipfiko & Maphosa 2019, 2020). The Examinations Council of Lesotho (ECOL) uses SBA for summative assessment, with practical subjects incorporating both coursework (30-50%) and theory examination marks (50-70%). For Food and Nutrition practical SBA, 50% of the practical mark contributes to the official qualification award for LGCSE.

Moderation in SBA should be an ongoing dialogue between moderators and teachers, rather than a one-time judgment at the end of the year. This continuous interaction promotes teacher development and positively impacts teaching. Additionally, monitoring should ensure that assessments are conducted satisfactorily, meet expected standards, and are consistent both within and between schools (Grima 2003:7).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The implementation of the Food and Nutrition curriculum in Lesotho's secondary schools faces multiple challenges, primarily revolving around resource limitations, societal attitudes, and educational policy implementation. This study investigates the various challenges associated with implementing the Food and Nutrition curriculum, specifically looking at the practical components of the curriculum within the context of LGCSE. In particular, the issue of resource constraints and support examined.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is encapsulated in the following objectives:

- 1) To explore the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Food and Nutrition syllabus of LGCSE.
- 2) To assess the impact of these challenges on the quality of education provided.
- 3) To gather teachers' perspectives on practical session implementation within the LGCSE framework.
- 4) To investigate challenges pertaining to instruction and oversight of practical aspects of the subject by teachers, including administrative support in accessing material resources for practical work.

The aim of the study will be obtained through answering the following research questions:

- Which challenges do teachers encounter when implementing the Food and Nutrition syllabus?
- What is the impact of these challenges on the quality of education?
- What are the experiences of teachers in the implementation of the curriculum?
- What kind of support do teachers require for effective teaching and learning.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study is grounded on pragmatic theory, which supports the use of mixed methods research by providing both philosophical justification and practical guidelines. Pragmatism advocates for an epistemology that integrates multiple paradigms, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to both data collection and analysis. This alignment enables action-oriented research, which is particularly suited for addressing complex phenomena by leveraging the strengths of both methodological approaches (Maareouf 2019). Furthermore, pragmatism emphasizes the development of practical skills, thereby aligning educational objectives with the demands of a competitive global environment (Chipfiko & Maphosa 2019).

The research was conducted across ten districts in Lesotho: Berea, Botha-Bothe, Leribe, Mafeteng, Mokhotlong, Maseru, Mhales' Hoek, Quthing, Qacha's Nek, and Thaba-Tseka. It utilized a convergent parallel mixed methods approach, as outlined by Creswell & Creswell (2018) and Maarouf (2019). This approach entails simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data, which are analyzed separately and then integrated during the interpretation phase to provide a holistic understanding of the

research question. Quantitative and qualitative analysis were carried out with SPSS 20 and Nvivo 1.7, respectively.

Convergence occurs because it is the researcher who integrates quantitative and qualitative data to explain the problem studied (Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado 2015), as shown in Figure 1.

For the quantitative component, a questionnaire using a 5-point likert-type scale with strongly disagree to strongly agree was administered on-line, to 37 randomly selected teachers from schools offering the Food and Nutrition practical subject. These participants also contributed to the qualitative component through interviews designed to gather deeper insights into their perceptions and experiences regarding the teaching and learning of the Food and Nutrition subject. This dual engagement with the same participants enriched the data collection process by providing both numerical data and contextual understanding.

The quantitative data aimed to measure objective aspects of the teaching experiences and outcomes, whereas the qualitative data focused on capturing subjective experiences and perceptions. The simultaneous use of these approaches helped to mitigate the limitations inherent in each method. For

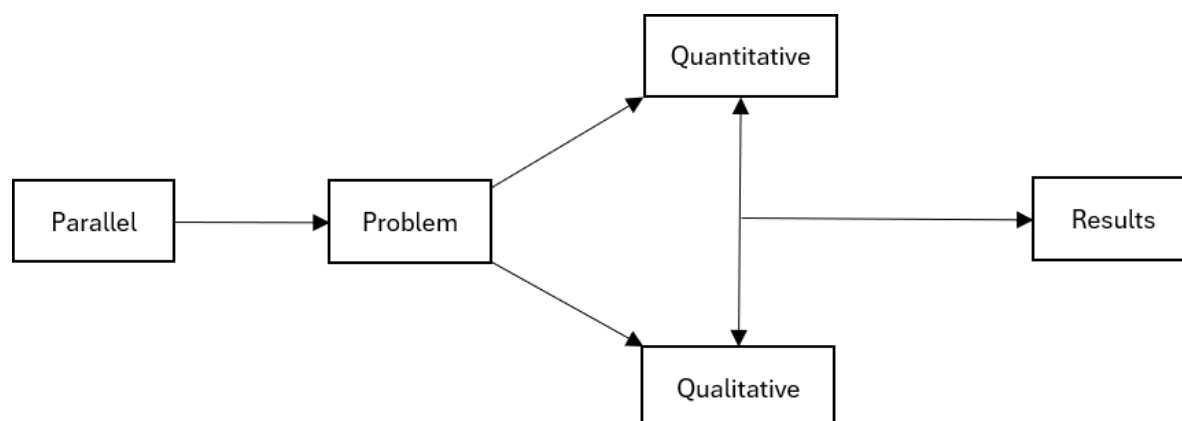


FIGURE 1: INTEGRATION OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA (PONCE & PAGA-MALDONADO 2015)

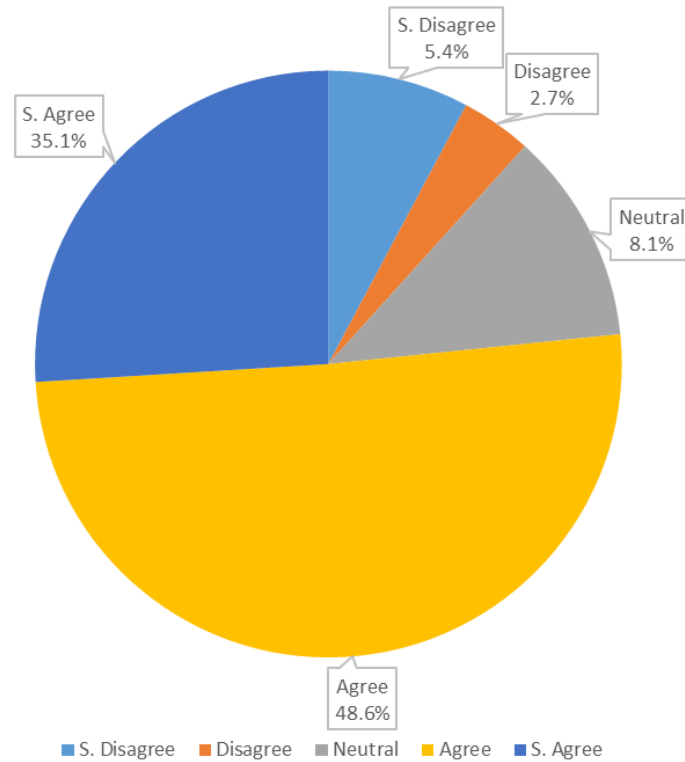


FIGURE 2: TEACHERS EXPERIENCE IN TEACHING PRACTICAL SUBJECTS

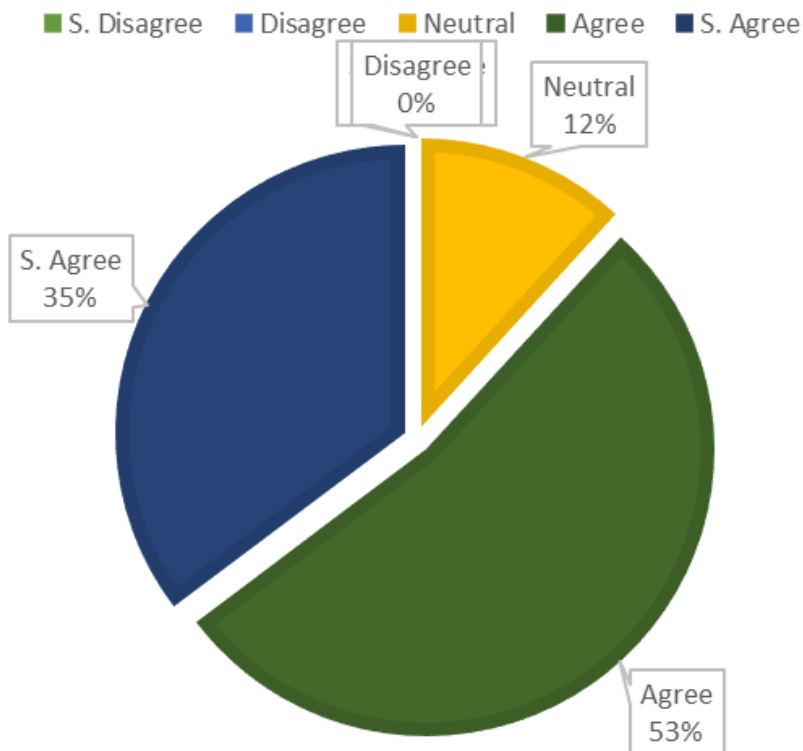


FIGURE 3: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON THEIR ABILITY TO IMPLEMENT PRACTICAL WORK UNDER PREVAILING CIRCUMSTANCES

instance, where quantitative data might lack context, qualitative insights provide depth and nuance. Conversely, the rigorous numerical analysis of quantitative data can strengthen the reliability of subjective qualitative interpretations. The analysis involving thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data, allowed for integrating both data forms to enhance the reliability of the findings (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove 2016:107; Creswell & Creswell 2017:218, 2018).

In fact, the mixed methods approach not only enhances the robustness of the findings but also increases the confidence in the conclusions drawn from the study, ensuring that they are well-supported and comprehensive (Chipfiko & Maphosa 2019). This methodological strategy is particularly effective for addressing the multifaceted nature of educational practices in a practical and theoretical manner.

FINDINGS

Factors affecting Food and Nutrition students' working process include shortages and delays in purchasing equipment, utensils, and ingredients, insufficient time, and large class sizes. Limited resources cause delays in using stoves and utensils, hindering skill development. Delayed supplies lead to long periods without practical exercises, impacting students' time management and practice before final assessments. Teachers report that inadequate time, equipment, and materials affect performance. Large classes necessitate group work, obscuring individual progress and skill development. Monitoring is challenging, often relying on theory over practical skills. Insufficient practice leaves students unprepared for SBA, with extra classes and group assessments failing to fully address these issues.

Resource constraints

Most of the equipment needed for teaching the practical skills component of Food and Nutrition is not available in schools. For this reason, the teacher is advised to improvise or request students to bring along their own equipment where possible. Teachers are encouraged to engage students in practical work to help them build their skills. When students undertake practical work they also develop the confidence to exhibit what they learn in similar situations (MOE 2010:9). The shortage of the necessary equipment and ingredients for practical sessions, is prevalent in many schools, something which compromises practical activities.

Figure 2 represents responses of teachers to the statement of asking about the adequacy of experience in teaching practical subjects.

The results show that 48.60% of the respondents strongly agreed and 35.10% also agreed, which effectively means that in total, 83.70% reported having adequate experience in teaching practical subjects. It should be noted, however, that teachers although teachers may be qualified, they can be discouraged from giving out their best by unsatisfactory working conditions. In order to effectively teach practical subjects, teachers need to be adequately trained so that they can have the required skills. This is because the greatest factor in teaching and learning is the teacher. As such, only an effective qualified and motivated teacher can adequately execute the requirements of a subject (Bhebhe & Nxumalo 2017:69).

Curriculum issues

The findings revealed a significant disparity in the availability of resources, which has led to a broad and inconsistently covered syllabus. Teachers expressed concerns about the

breadth of the syllabus and the lack of specific guidelines, which often leave them to decide independently on the content to teach. Many teachers cope by focusing on limited topics or adapting the curriculum informally with colleagues. Notably, despite these challenges, a majority of teachers felt they managed well in engaging students in practical activities. The LGCSE syllabus until 2022 was covered in two years with the content perceived too broad by participant teachers. They teachers argued that they struggle to determine what to be taught without guidelines as a result of the broad and unspecific syllabus expected to be taught within a two-year period. This absence of clear guidelines was reportedly overwhelming to the teachers and learners, thereby resulting in inconsistencies in content delivery. The following observation was made by some teachers during the interviews:

“The food and nutrition syllabus is too broad so teachers teach what they want; they do not have a specific topic because there are no guidelines for content coverage within a period of two years. In some cases, individual teachers decide on what they want to teach, and other cases in a particular region teachers meet and agree and plan together what they would want to teach from the broad scope.”

Time allocation and syllabus coverage

Insufficient time is allocated for practical sessions, often resulting in the integration of theoretical and practical components in limited periods. Both teachers and students face pressure due to inadequate time allocated for practical sessions, which often results in the use of theoretical teaching time for practical activities. The broad nature of the syllabus which is expected to be covered within a constrained two-year period, makes it difficult for teachers to cover all required content

effectively. Following are the remarks of some of the interviewees:

“I have asked the timetable committee makers to allocate my practical slots towards lunch or towards after school so that we extend our time. We only have one double period per week for practical.”

another respondent indicated that:

“I have to ask and beg other teachers for extra time within their lessons” and another gave the following observation: “We need more time because we are unable to cover all the content. The group is too big, if I have enough time I will be able to divide them according to the time I have.”

Challenges identified

A major issue was the unavailability of equipment and ingredients, which hinders the practical teaching of Food and Nutrition. For effective teaching and learning to take place in a school, there should be adequate teaching materials and adoption of the appropriate teaching methods (Ndem & Akubue 2016:104).

Figure 3 represents responses of teachers to the statement:

Coping? with engaging learners in practical work.

In Figure 3, most of the participants (88%) indicated that they managed to engage learners in practical work regardless of resource constraints. The respondents, however, reported that it was difficult to monitor learners in large groups because of lack of resources. Consequently, the teachers resorted to group work and demonstrations for students which tends to compromise

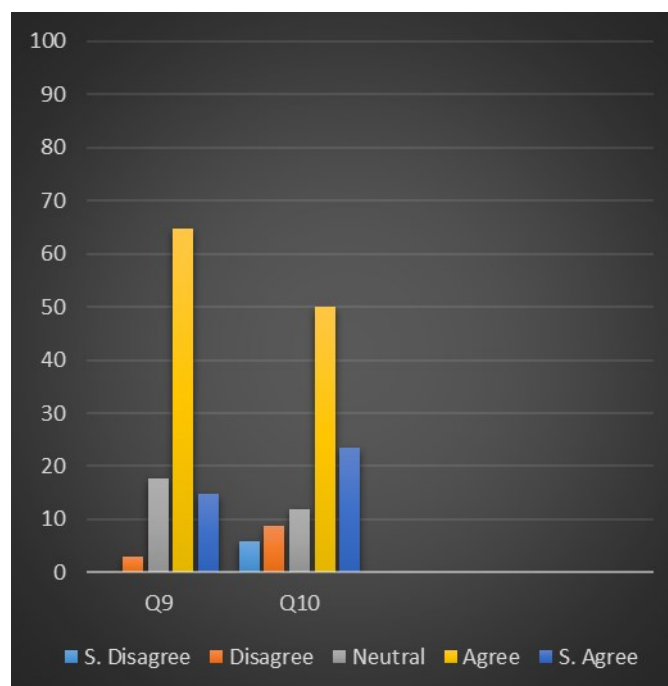


FIGURE 4: FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE POSITIVELY AND NEGATIVELY TO LEARNERS

creativity, interest and individual participation of learners. Participants further indicated that a shortage of storage for equipment, utensils and ingredients, as well as insufficient time and the large numbers of students, were factors affecting the working progress of learners in Food and Nutrition. With equipment for instance, there is a certain number of learners allowed to use a stove in one given time, it is difficult for the teacher to reach and monitor each learner in bigger groups and classes. The few utensils necessitate that learners wait for each other. The insufficient amount of ingredients does not allow the learners to practice. Students do not develop the working skill and they are unable to complete practical examination as they hardly know what to do and are slow. One of the interviewees commented as follows:

“The practical is not easily performed due to lack of equipment and ingredients in our school. So we end up doing practical when they are about to write

the exam, thus they do not get enough practice.”

Figure 4 represents factors contributing positively and negatively to learners' practical work in response to questions 9 and 10.

Figure 4 shows that 65% of the participants agreed that there were positive factors and 50% indicated that there were negative factors that affected the execution of practical work. Amongst the positive factors were the dedication of both teachers and learners in Home Economics, which is evident through their willingness to use weekends and holidays for practical work. When ingredients were available, teachers often negotiated extra time from their colleagues to extend practical sessions. There was a noticeable passion for the subject among students, who showed a keen interest in participating in practical work. However, several negative factors were observed, including insufficient time allocated for practical work, which was limited to three periods per week alongside

TABLE 1: TEACHERS' COMMENTS ON FOOD AND NUTRITION MODERATION

MODERATION											
Food and Nutrition		Q1: Moderation process necessary for all practical subjects		Q2: I understand value of moderation process		Q3: Experienced challenges with moderation process		Q4: Moderation process affects learners' performance positively		Q5: Moderation process affects learners' performance negatively	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
	Valid	25	67.6	25	67.8	26	70.3	25	67.8	26	70.3
Strongly Disagree	1	0	0	0	0	1	2.7	0	0	4	10.8
Disagree	2	0	0	0	0	3	8.1	1	2.7	3	8.1
Neutral	3	2	5.4	4	10.8	4	10.8	3	8.1	3	8.1
Agree	4	2	5.4	2	5.4	3	8.1	2	5.4	1	2.7
Strongly Agree	5	8	21.6	6	16.2	0	0	6	16.2	0	0
	Total	37	100	37	100	37	100	37	100	37	100

two theory periods, each lasting only 40 minutes.

Challenges such as a lack of ingredients and equipment, poor maintenance and inadequate laboratory sizes, as well as delayed funding further hindered effective practical learning. There was also a prevalent misconception among educators outside the Home Economics field, who undervalued the subject, believing it to be simple cooking rather than understanding its complexities. This misconception, coupled with a belief that technical subjects are meant for the less privileged, contributed to a lack of interest and negative attitudes toward practical subjects among students. The need for changing these attitudes and increasing support from administration was highlighted as crucial for improving the situation (Bhebhe & Nxumalo 2017: 66-67; Du Toit 2021:30).

Teachers expressed concern that these challenges hinder not only the delivery of the curriculum but also affect the motivation and engagement of the students in learning. Despite these difficulties, some positive aspects were also noted, including teachers' dedication and occasional administrative support, which somewhat mitigated the negative impacts.

Challenges in marking practical examinations

Lack of adequate equipment, delays students' performance and pace. This results in unfair assessments, as students are unable to complete tasks within the allotted time due to waiting for shared equipment.

Assessors often have to travel long distances to remote schools without receiving travel or transport and meal allowances upfront. This financial burden can be problematic if assessors lack funds at the time of assessment.

Some assessors may harbor negative attitudes or biases, especially if they are assigned to the same school for multiple years, which can disadvantage students. Maintaining objectivity and fairness across different schools and exam cycles is a significant challenge.

Teachers who are familiar with the assessment process tend to manage better, while others struggle. Some learners have to take their final examinations without the benefit of mock exams, impacting their preparedness.

Table 1 shows that Food and Nutrition respondents within a range of 16.20% to

21.60% strongly agreed that moderation process was necessary for all practical subjects. The interviewees understood the value of the moderation process and moderation appreciating that the moderation process affected learners' performance positively. Some 10.80% of the respondents strongly disagreed that the moderation process affected learners' performance negatively, while another 10.80% were neutral regarding challenges with the moderation process.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal a significant gap between curriculum expectations and the actual teaching environment, due to resource limitations and syllabus structure. These issues not only affect the quality of education but also impede the practical application of knowledge, which is crucial for student success in this field. These challenges underscore the need for a systematic review of both the curriculum and resource allocation for effective delivery of Food and Nutrition education in Lesotho. Home Economics classrooms should meet the contemporary requirements for achieving learning outcomes. The subject's teachers, know better the requirements for a Home Economics classroom for conducive learning (Okorie, Effiong & Akpan 2021:42). Teaching of practical subjects should be participatory and should be based on student-centred methods such as experiments, demonstrations, practical work and project work (MOE 2010:6; Idris & Rajuddin 2012).

This study concludes that to effectively teach Food and Nutrition within the LGCSE, there must be a more structured curriculum, adequate provisioning of resources, better time management, proper curriculum alignment with realistic educational goals, and sufficient practical session time. Teachers

also require better support and training to handle the demands of the curriculum effectively. The study highlighted significant challenges and teachers' perspectives in the implementation of the Food and Nutrition curriculum. However, the prospects for improving and enhancing the effectiveness of this practical education are numerous, offering pathways to greater employment opportunities and societal well-being.

The participants emphasized limitation in equipment, tools, materials, and ingredients, not only in Food and Nutrition but also in other subjects. These resources are often unavailable, insufficient, or arrive late in the year, forcing teachers to delay practical exercises until provisions are made. According to Joshua (2015:3), a shortage of funds, equipment, and facilities significantly impacts vocational and technical education. Practical subjects have challenges of infrastructure, insufficient funding, poor maintenance, and ill-equipped laboratories which thus hamper quality learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) should revise the Food & Nutrition syllabus to align better with realistic teaching goals, resources available and the time frames for the course.
- 2) MOET should offer enhanced support and orientation for teachers on managing practical assessments and SBA.
- 3) MOET should undertake regular review and assessment of resource allocation to ensure that all schools are adequately equipped for practical lessons.
- 4) MOET should engage with stakeholders, including educational authorities and school administrations, to prioritize Food and Nutrition as a critical subject area requiring targeted support.
- 5) Schools should ensure that minimum

basic resources are available for conducting practical sessions.

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