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Serial ***Home Economics Education in Japan 12***

This serial focuses on the characteristics and current issues surrounding home economics education in Japan, while also providing a historical perspective.

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Home Economics Education Inculcates Independence

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Key words

home economics education, independence, independent living, independence for everyday life

1. Independence

Independence means the self-sufficiency of a person to live by one's ability and in harmony with others. "Children and youths are citizens; therefore they possess a desire for independence, respectively. Based on this assumption, it is an inherent problem in education to provide opportunities to inculcate and develop independence, namely skills, knowledge, and attitudes, to be able to live as a self-sufficient and productive human being in society" (Aoki et al. , 1988).

As such, it has become one of the aims of education to educate and nurture students to be independent. Furthermore, in the fields of special support education and welfare for persons with disabilities, the meaning of independence has evolved into a concept of independence endowed with rights for self-option and self-decision to achieve social independence, occupational independence, and life independence. It is stated that "it is a new meaning of independence that one achieve one's objectives by self-choice and self-decision by asking someone for help as needed, and when a person achieves something by one's will and ability" (Mogi et al. , 2010).

Although mental independence, economic independence, and independent living are essential for a self-sufficient life, the ability to achieve independent living, particularly, has been a significant focus from the perspectives and aims of home economics education, especially since these skills for independent living are inherent and specific to home economics education.

2. Home economics education and independent living

Although the definitions of independent living has been varied until now, I regard this term as the ability to deal with subjects inherent in everyday life by oneself, to solve life problems and issues by oneself based on one's values and standards, and to live sustainably according to one's own choices.

Figure 1 shows the results of a questionnaire that was administered to investigate the views of high school students about home economics education. Answers indicating "strong agreement" and "agreement" were totaled. Based on the calculated responses of agreement and strong agreement by the participants, 93.4% replied that home economics education was important to live, and 89.7%

indicated that home economics education was useful for everyday life.

To sustain life independently and to live safely and healthily, knowledge and skills that are related to food, clothing, and housing are essential. In home economics education, which is an integrated and practical scientific discipline, students are taught knowledge and skills that are related to living conditions, such as food, clothing, and housing. In addition, high school students learn about management of time and money, family economics, and pension and life security in home economics education. Students, then, would acquire the ability to manage one’s own life and to decide on everyday life matters on their own. Moreover, high school students learn about functions of a home, family relations, adolescent life, child development, childcare, and senior welfare, in home economics education. With that, they acquire the abilities to decide their own way of life as well as to create harmonized living with others. I think that such forms of learning would enable high school students to recognize that home economics education is important to live.

Although the knowledge and skills that are necessary for everyday life are taught and developed based on the collective context of family and family life, these knowledge and skills are, in fact, individual, fragmentary, and phenomenon-dependent in nature. When faced with a new situation or problem, in order to judge and manage the issue at hand with the most suitable solution, possessing sound, varied, and adaptive skills and knowledge is necessary. The ability to accommodate to any situation and any circumstance is cultivated in home economics education by learning scientifically about knowledge and skills that are crucial for everyday life.

3. Independence and the comprehensive nature of home economics education

The theme of family life as the learning target of home economics education possesses a complex and comprehensive character in itself. The family living environment is formed under the influence of many other factors, such as the natural environment, society, economy, and culture. Furthermore, the actions in everyday life are performed based on cooperation with or support from the family

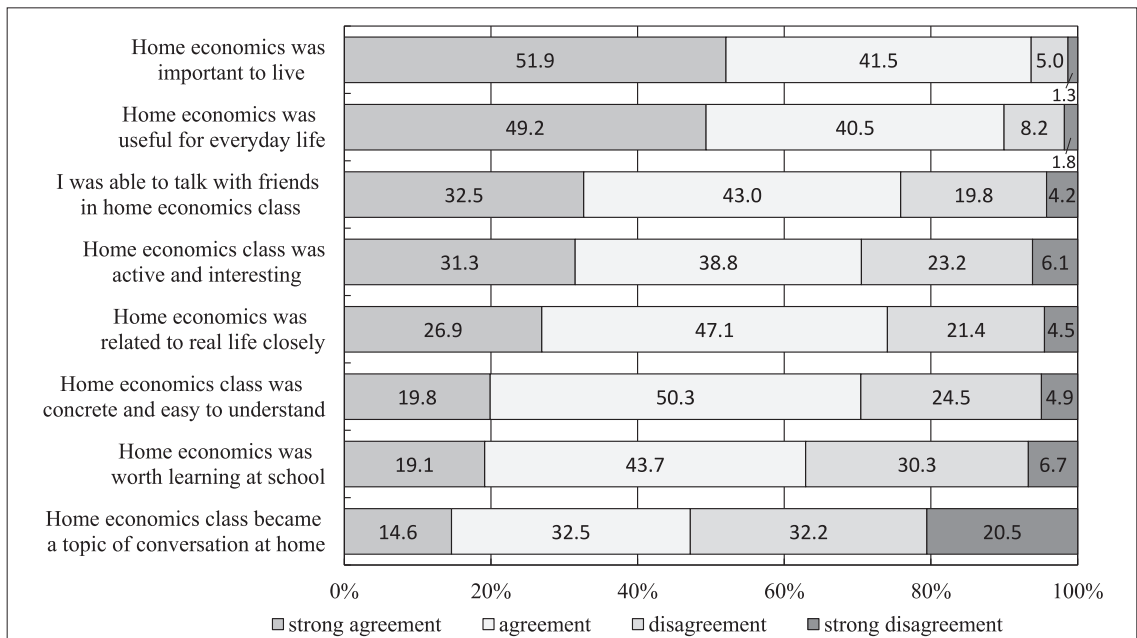


Figure 1 : The views of high school students about home economics education

Source: Kouno Kimiko, et al. (2007). *Journal of the Japan association of home economics education*, 50 (1), 41

and community among others. To illustrate, a family meal is one of the most common but relevant example that represents the result of various factors combined towards achieving a single purpose, that is, the meal itself. Some of the factors that influenced how and what family meal looks like include nature, social structure and status, family structure, family economics, culinary knowledge and skills, and personal taste. The variety of ingredients used in a meal metaphorically represents the multiplicity of elements/factors involved in the background of a particular act or situation (in this case, preparing a family meal).

Therefore, if a person focuses on only one aspect of an issue or a problem in their daily life, they will not be able to find a solution to it. To be able to do so requires analyzing the issue or problem from different perspectives so that practical and achievable choices can be generated as possible solutions to a problem or issue. The abilities to comprehensively judge an issue or solve a problem that pertains to everyday life cannot be cultivated by a school subject that analytically focuses on a singular aspect of an object. Such problem-solving ability and comprehensive judgment can be cultivated in home economics education by learning about managing the complicated and comprehensive family life.

Considering the issues and problems in real society are equally comprehensive and complicated as the issues and problems in everyday life, a problem-solving ability and comprehensive judgment acquired in home economics education are important to live independently in such a society.

4. Home economics education: Learning about independence and symbiosis

To realize one's dream and to live comfortably, support from the family and many other people is necessary. In home economics education, students not only learn about social structure and symbiosis in a social system, but they also study about symbiosis by their contact with different people in their society (e.g., a family member, an infant, an elderly person, and a member of the community). Through such learning, students can deeply recognize that different persons have different ways of thinking and different ways of doing. In addition, through such learning in home economics education, students can deepen their understanding of other people and develop empathy for others. This, in turn, fosters a sense of community in the students and develops their understanding of mutual and communal support. I think that such learning in home economics education can cultivate the ability to live together with others in society.

In home economics education, students are exposed to various thinking and diverse values. Through such learning, students can acquire not only the abilities and skills for independent living, but also the sense of values and the ability to make appropriate judgment, to develop a comprehensive view of things, and to collaborate with others. Thus, home economics education develops in students the ability to live independently. In line with the points presented, I think that home economics education undertakes to achieve one of the central aims of education, that is, to develop independence in individuals.

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