



Laundry Skills Needs of Mothers in the Maintenance of Primary School Children's Clothing in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive survey study examined the laundry skills needs of mothers in maintaining primary school children's clothing in the Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area (LGA) of Enugu State. Effective laundry is vital for children's hygiene, social confidence, and the preservation of household resources. The population comprised approximately 4,500 mothers, from which a sample of 240 mothers was drawn using multi-stage sampling. Data were collected using a structured Mothers' Laundry Skills Needs Questionnaire (MLSNQ) and analysed using mean scores $\{\bar{X}\}$ and Standard Deviation (SD). The mean criterion of 2.50 was used to identify needed skills and challenges. Findings revealed significant skill deficits across all three laundry phases. The highest skill needs were concentrated in pre-washing skills, specifically in interpreting care labels $\{\bar{X}\}=3.85$ and specialised stain removal $\{\bar{X}\}=3.69$, and finishing skills, particularly correct ironing techniques for blended fabrics $\{\bar{X}\}=3.79$. The most significant challenges faced were an inconsistent public water supply $\{\bar{X}\}=2.89$ and lack of time $\{\bar{X}\}=2.75$ due to competing responsibilities. The most effective strategy identified was the organisation of practical workshops by Home Economists $\{\bar{X}\}=3.92$. The study concluded that mothers require urgent, targeted intervention in technical laundry skills, complemented by infrastructural support, to ensure the optimal maintenance of their children's clothing.

Keywords: Laundry Skills, Mothers, Primary School Children, Clothing Maintenance, Needs Assessment, Igbo-Etiti.

INTRODUCTION

Primary education sets the foundation for a child's social and cognitive development. Primary school children, typically falling within the age range of 6 to 12 years, are characterised by high levels of physical activity, continuous growth, and an increasing need for social acceptance. Their school attendance is mandatory, and they require a specific set of clothing to meet their daily needs.

These garments are indispensable as they facilitate physical activity, reinforce school discipline, and significantly influence the child's social presentation and sense of belonging among peers. The importance of meeting these clothing needs lies not only in provision but also in maintenance; clean, well-kept clothes are fundamental to hygiene, health, and psychological well-being (Anderson, 2021).

The responsibility for this intensive garment maintenance typically falls upon the mother or a delegated caregiver. For these clothes to fulfil their

function to be clean, stain-free, and structurally sound, they require systematic and skilled intervention. This intervention is primarily articulated through laundry and textile care. Laundry is far more than simply washing; it is a complex, multi-stage process that, when executed correctly, extends the lifespan of the garments and optimises family resources.

As observed by Okafor (2022), "The true cost of a uniform is determined not by its purchase price, but by the mother's skill in its sustained maintenance.

Clothing Needs of Primary School Children

School Uniforms: Required for institutional identity, promoting equality, and minimising wardrobe decisions. These items are subject to frequent, heavy-duty use.

Play and Casual Wear: Needed for physical education, outdoor activities, and home use. These clothes endure dirt, grass stains, and rapid wear from active play.

Undergarments and Sleepwear: Essential for hygiene and comfort.

It is paramount to meet their clothing needs not just by provision, but by maintenance. Clean, neat, and well-fitting clothes are crucial for a child's health (reducing skin infections), psychological well-being (boosting self-esteem and social confidence), and concentration in school.

The Need for Clothing Maintenance

Maintenance involves all processes that keep clothing serviceable, aesthetically pleasing, and hygienic. Laundry is the most frequent and critical aspect of clothing maintenance. Effective laundry extends the economic life of the garments, protecting the family's investment. Conversely, poor laundry practices, such as incorrect stain treatment or harsh washing, accelerate the deterioration of fabrics, colour fading, and damage to stitching.

The maintenance of children's clothing is primarily the responsibility of the mothers or other delegated caregivers. For mothers to ensure effective maintenance, they must possess adequate laundry skills. These skills encompass a sequence of complex steps, which can be categorised for educational purposes: pre-washing, washing, and finishing skills.

In Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area (LGA) of Enugu State, a predominantly agrarian region, mothers often face constraints related to time, access to modern laundry equipment, and consistent supply of water and electricity. The present scenario suggests a reliance on traditional methods, which may be inadequate for the care of modern, often blended, uniform fabrics. Evidence of uniforms with embedded stains, ripped seams, and distorted shapes highlights the urgency of assessing and addressing these skill deficits. The acquisition of these specialised laundry skills by mothers is necessary to safeguard the investment in their children's clothing and promote better student presentation and hygiene.

Purpose of the Study:

The overall objective of this study is to determine the laundry skills needs of mothers in the maintenance of primary school children's clothing in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State.

Specifically, the study sought to determine the mothers' skills needs regarding:

1. Pre-washing skills (e.g., reading care labels, sorting, mending, and stain removal).
2. Washing skills (e.g., soaking, agitation, rinsing, wringing/water extraction, and drying).

3. Finishing skills (e.g., ironing/pressing, airing, and proper storage).
4. Challenges encountered by mothers in the maintenance of the children's clothing.
5. Strategies for solving the identified challenges.

Research Questions

1. What are the pre-washing skills needed by mothers for the effective maintenance of primary school children's clothing?
2. What are the washing skills needed by mothers for the effective maintenance of primary school children's clothing?
3. What are the finishing skills needed by mothers for the effective maintenance of primary school children's clothing?
4. What are the challenges faced by mothers in the maintenance of their children's clothing?
5. What are the strategies for solving the challenges faced by mothers in the maintenance of their children's clothing?

METHODOLOGY

Design of the study

The study adopted a Descriptive Survey Research Design. This design is appropriate because it allows for the collection of data on the characteristics, current practices, and needs of a specified population (mothers) without manipulating any variables. It focuses on documenting the "what is" regarding the mothers' laundry skills and needs in the study area.

Area of Study

The study was conducted in the Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area (LGA) of Enugu State, Nigeria. Igbo-Etiti is one of the 17 LGAs in Enugu State, located in the northern senatorial zone. The LGA is predominantly rural and agrarian, with most residents engaged in farming, petty trading, and craftsmanship. The socio-economic background of the area presents unique challenges (e.g., intermittent power/water supply, limited access to modern facilities) that directly impact home management and laundry practices, making it an ideal location for this needs assessment.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all mothers (or female caregivers) responsible for the laundry maintenance of primary school children in the Igbo-Etiti LGA. Based on data obtained from the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) for the last academic session, there were approximately 4,500 female caregivers/mothers of children

enrolled in the public primary schools within the LGA.

Sample and Sample Techniques

Cluster and simple random techniques were used to get the sample size of 240 respondents. The cluster sampling technique is used when the respondents are scattered over a vast geographical area.

Instrument for Data Collection

The primary instrument used was a structured questionnaire titled "Mothers' Laundry Skills Needs Questionnaire (MLSNQ)." The instrument was designed using a 4-point Likert-type scale with response options weighted as follows:

4 = Highly Needed (HN)

3 = Needed (N)

2 = Slightly Needed (SN)

1 = Not Needed (NN)

The MLSNQ was divided into six sections corresponding to the study objectives (A-F):

Section A: Demographic Data.

Section B: Pre-Washing Skills Needs.

Section C: Washing Skills Needs.

Section D: Finishing Skills Needs.

Section E: Challenges Faced (using a 3-point scale: Highly Challenging, Moderately Challenging, Not Challenging).

Section F: Strategies for Solving Challenges (using a 4-point scale: Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Disagreed, Strongly Disagreed).

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The questionnaire was face and content validated by experts from Home Economics and Hospitality Management of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka., To determine the reliability of the instrument a pilot test was carried out using 20 respondents who did not form the sample size during real test. Cronbach's Alpha reliability index was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument and the reliability was estimated at 0.9822, which was considered highly reliable.

Method of Data Collection

The questionnaire was administered to the sampled mothers with the assistance of five (5) trained research assistants. Permission was obtained from the school authorities prior to administration, and informed consent was secured from all respondents. The retrieval rate was over 90%.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data collected were analyzed using mean ($\bar{X}$) and standard deviation (SD). The findings of the study are shown below:

Research Question 1: What are the pre-washing skills needed by mothers for maintenance of primary school children's clothing in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A?

Table 1: Mean Rating of Pre-Washing Skills Needs of Mothers

S/N	Item Statement	$\{\bar{X}\}$	SD	Decision
1	Reading and interpretation of fabric care labels	3.85	0.12	Needed
2	Specialized stain removal like Ink, Rust and Biro	3.69	0.45	Highly needed
3	Sorting by colour and fabric type	2.55	0.88	Needed
4	Mending of clothes before washing	3.51	0.68	Needed

Table 1 shows that all pre-skills needs items had mean above 2.50 cut off point. The highest mean score (3.85) was for item 1, indicating that reading and interpretation of fabric care labels is the most highly needed.

Research Question 2: What are the washing skill needed by mothers for the effective maintenance of primary school children's clothing?

Table 2: Mean Rating for Washing Skill Needs of Mothers

S/N	Item Statement	$\{\bar{X}\}$	SD	Decision
5	Detergent selection and measuring for specific Fabric	3.27	0.31	Highly needed
6	Water temperature needed	3.55	0.52	Highly needed
7	Proper wringing and rinsing techniques	2.48	0.91	Not needed

Table 2 shows that two out of three items relating to mothers washing skills is highly needed with mean score of 3.72 and 3.55 respectively, while the item statement; proper wringing and rinsing techniques with mean score 2.48 which is below 2.50 as decision rule is not needed.

Research Question 3: What are the finishing skills needed by mothers of effective maintenance of primary school children's clothing in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A?

Table 3: Mean Rating for Finishing Skills Needed by Mothers in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A

S/N	Item Statement	$\{\bar{X}\}$	SD	Decision
8	Ironing techniques for blended fabric	3.79	0.22	Highly needed
9	Proper folding and Pest-storage	3.61	0.44	Highly needed

Table 3 shows that all finishing skills needed by mothers in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A for maintenance of primary school children's clothing scored mean above 2.50 which make them highly needed.

Research Question 4: What are the challenges faced by mothers of Igbo-Etiti L.G.A in the maintenance of their primary school children's clothing?

Table 4: Mean Rating for Challenges Faced by Mothers in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A. in the Maintenance of Primary School Children's Clothing.

S/N	Item Statement	$\{\bar{X}\}$	SD	Decision
10	Inconsistent public water supply	2.88	0.61	Accepted
11	Lack of time (farm, domestic chores)	2.75	0.70	Accepted
12	Lack of Money	3.40	0.75	Accepted
13	Sources of specialized stain removal agent	2.45	0.88	Rejected
14	High cost of detergent	2.68	0.55	Accepted

Table 4 showed that lack of money is the most accepted challenge faced by mothers in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A in maintenance of their primary school children's clothing with mean score of 3.40. other item statements are accepted with mean above 2.50 respectively while item statement; source of specialized stain removal agents is rejected with mean score of 2.45 which is below cut off point of 2.50

Research Question 5: What are the strategies for solving the challenges faced by mothers of Igbo-Etiti in maintenance of their primary school children's clothing.

Table 5, showed that all the strategies for solving the challenges faced by mothers in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A.

in maintenance of their primary school children's clothing were highly needed with mean score of 3.92 and 3.80 respectively.

Table 5: Mean Score Rating of Strategies for Solving the Challenges Faced by Mothers in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A in Clothing Maintenance of their Primary School Children.

S/N	Item Statement	$\{\bar{X}\}$	SD	Decision
15	Practical workshops by home economist	3.92	0.10	Highly Needed
16	Improved community water access	3.80	0.15	Highly Needed

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings revealed significant skill needs across all three phases of laundry (pre-washing, washing, and finishing).

The high need for pre-washing skills like interpreting care labels and specialized stain removal aligns with observations of rapid garment damage. Many modern school uniforms are made of synthetic or blended fabrics requiring precise care, which traditional methods often (Nwogu, 2021).

The necessity for training in neglect washing skills, particularly detergent and temperature selection, suggests that mothers may be employing a one-size-fits-all approach, contributing to color loss and accelerated wear.

This finding is consistent with studies highlighting the limited application of scientific principles in rural laundry practices (Ugochukwu, 2019).

The high need for finishing skills (ironing techniques and storage) indicates that while clothes may be clean, the presentation often suffers, which defeats the purpose of maintaining a neat school uniform.

The challenges of water scarcity and time constraints, being highly ranked, confirm the influence of the socio-economic environment of Igbo-Etiti LGA on clothing maintenance effectiveness. The strategies identified underscore the need for both educational intervention (skill training) and infrastructural support (water supply) to truly solve the problem.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that mothers in Igbo-Etiti LGA exhibit significant skill deficits across all phases of the laundry process, specifically in interpreting fabric care instructions, applying specialized stain removal techniques, selecting appropriate detergents, and using finishing equipment (ironing) correctly. Furthermore, the effectiveness of their maintenance efforts is severely hampered by major infrastructural challenges, particularly water scarcity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Home Economics Extension Services: Should immediately design and implement practical, hands-on workshops focused on the highest-need areas: specialized stain removal for common school stains (ink, mud, oil) and correct handling of blended uniform fabrics during washing and ironing.
2. Local Government Administration: Should prioritize and invest in projects aimed at improving the community water supply across Igbo-Etiti LGA to alleviate the major constraint faced by mothers in clothing maintenance and hygiene.
3. School Authorities: Should incorporate short, practical demonstrations on uniform

care and maintenance during Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, focusing on reading care labels and basic mending techniques.

4. Local Detergent and Chemical Vendors should be encouraged to stock and provide education on the correct and economical use of specialized optional treatments (bluing, starch) and affordable, high-quality stain removal products.

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