

The Role of the School Subjects' Name on its Content and Image

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Abstract: One of the schools' educational targets is to give students the best possible readiness for coping in their independent life in contemporary society. Therefore, the content of different school subjects need to be in continuous changes simultaneously with the developments in society. Changes are visible also in the adjustments of school curricula which channels societal developments into school lessons. Similarly, home economics education is in continuous change and development. The content of home economics education in Estonia has widened within last decades with the focus moving from obtaining practical skills to becoming a responsible citizen. This article gives a brief overview of the developments of home economics education in Estonia. In addition, the role of subjects' name in relation with its image is opened. Although the name of the subject home economics has been introduced already in 1996 it is still misused in writings and discussions between different parties (teachers, students, parents, school leaders). This study used document analysis to map the information related with home economics education on all schools' web-pages in Estonia to analyse what is the officially presented name of the school subject. Results are opened in the light of the background knowledge – history and language. Based on the results, inaccurate names and adaptations that originate already from 1930s are in active use. What it tells about the image of the subject if besides the official name in curriculum 13 different name variations are also used?

Keywords: home economics, school subject, change, image, school education.

Introduction

In this paper, image of a school subject is treated as appearance (Martin, 1998). Every school subject has an appearance which may or may not fairly reflect their essence, for example, positive image may be only a mask to cover up a less attractive or acceptable reality. Or vice versa, negative image may overshadow the true content of a school subject. G. Martin (1998) clarifies that, although the view of image as self-created has been popular; today it is believed to be a projection of the inner reality which is mediated by the relationships with other people and other fields. He continues that the image of a school subject “will be projected through the statements and activities of those involved and the milieu that they create”. In addition, image is influenced by historical factors – like anecdote and assumptions; and by semantic factors – jargon, metaphor and connotation.

Historical and semantic influences are also seen in the image of home economics in Estonia. During Soviet times, the content of home economics was not valued, meaning that lessons were held minimally if all, topics were narrowed into practical food preparation and these were organized as part of craft lessons for girls (*tütarlaste tööõpetus*; Estonian names are used hereafter). Food preparation lessons (Table 1) were called cookery lessons by teachers and students. In the first curriculum (*Eesti põhi...*, 1996) of emancipated Estonia, the name of home economics was presented again using shortened form (*kodundus*). Through history, the subject home economics has had mainly two official names in Estonian - *kodumajandus* (before 1944) and *kodundus* (after 1996) (more about the development and the content of *kodumajandus* in J. Taar article (Taar, 2015)). Both names are translated into English as home economics. *Kodumajandus* consists of two words *kodu* (meaning home) and *majandus* (meaning economy). *Kodundus* is shortened version of the name that was adapted to make it more convenient to use. Shortened version of the name is appropriate as it consists of the word *kodu* and an appendix *ndus* which is used to add to the noun to express an activity. Therefore, the name *kodundus* takes together all activities that are related with home.

Since 1996 home economics stayed united with handicraft and was in the curriculum named as handicraft and home economics (National Curriculum ..., 2014). Nevertheless, the name cookery lessons remained in everyday talk and are strongly in everyday language till today. Using these names actively in school context gives wrong image also for the wider community. K. Aava (2010) claims, that repeating wrong concepts constantly makes it axiomatic in socio-cultural context. Cookery stands narrowly for food preparation and does not involve other important areas of home economics education.

Table 1

The development of the official subject names under the subject field technology
(Keskkooli õppekavad..., 1930; Kaheksaklassilise kooli..., 1976; Eesti põhi..., 1996; Põhikooli ja..., 2002; National Curriculum..., 2014)

Year	School subject names	
1930	Grades 1-6	Grades 7-8; grades 9-12
	<i>Kujutamine ja tööõpetus</i> (Drawing and craft); included one topic of home economics – <i>majapidamine</i> (Housekeeping)	<i>Käsitööõpetus</i> (Craft studies); <i>Kodumajapidamine</i> (Household); <i>Käsitöö tütarlastele</i> (Handicraft for girls); <i>Majapidamisõpetus</i> (Household studies)
1976		Grades 4-8
		Tütarlaste tööõpetus (Craft for girls); included two topics of home economics – <i>toitlustamine</i> (Catering) and <i>korrastustööd</i> (Household works) Poeglaste tööõpetus (Craft for boys)
1996	Grades 1-4	Grades 5-9
	<i>Tööõpetus</i> (Craft)	<i>Käsitöö</i> (Handicraft); <i>Kodundus</i> (Home economics); <i>Tööõpetus</i> (Craft)
2002	Grades 1-3	Grades 4-9
	<i>Tööõpetus (Craft)</i>	
	<i>Käsitööõpetus</i> (Craft studies)	<i>Käsitöö</i> (Handicraft); <i>Kodundus</i> (Home economics); <i>Töö- ja tehnoloogiaõpetus</i> (Craft and technology studies)
2011 renewed on 2014	Grades 1-3	Grades 4-9
	Tehnoloogia valdkond (Subject field Technology)	
	<i>Tööõpetus</i> (Craft)	<i>Käsitöö ja kodundus</i> (Handicraft and home economics); <i>Tehnoloogiaõpetus</i> (Technology studies)

G. Martin (1998) claims, that little attention is paid on how the image of a school subject is perceived by significant others. Teaching colleagues, parents and others are left with unhelpful, contradictory or misleading impressions which hinder the efforts of the subject area practitioners (Martin, 1998). Latter may deepen the understanding that some school subjects are less valuable than others. It is exactly what may happen with the area of home economics education in Estonia when those responsible for the image of this school subject ignore their obligation. Home economics as a practice oriented subject may be placed on a lower level of curriculum hierarchy like explained by J. Bleazby (2015). Therefore, it is important to carefully consider what kind of image is projected by those involved. As seen from the table above, the name of the school subject handicraft and home economics in Estonia has changed a lot and these developments are not very systematic. As an example, the historical development of the name shows how, in different curricula, craft has been used either for labelling the subject in primary schools, for identifying all craft related lessons (and concretizing groups with gender), for naming only boys' craft lessons or for taking together the whole subject area. It is understandable, that change in the regime of the state has influenced also educational regulations (before 1991). Nevertheless, it is not known why the name of the school subject has been so unstable during last decades.

G. Martin (1998) names several benefits of a consideration of image. Two of these are named here. First, image helps to recognize the place of the subject area in relation to other subjects. Home economics allows putting theoretical knowledge studied in other school subjects (like chemistry, biology, mathematics) into actions which helps students to understand complex abstract knowledge. For subject integration teachers need to collaborate and therefore the image of the school subject needs to be strong and advised. Second, image helps to identify personal as well as organisational development targets. Even further, image is a necessary feature of curriculum management and strong force for change. To enable needed developments, it is crucial that the image of a school subject is true.

Although school is considered to be traditional institution and changes are slow to come into force, school curriculum is constantly in change as subjects need to respond to socio-cultural needs. Lesson amount in a week, the content of different subjects and even the name of a subject may become “arenas of conflict” between political, academic and school communities (Jephcote, Davies, 2007). Home economics as a school subject has gone through remarkable changes in different countries. For example, because of various school reforms in Latvia the content of home economics and technologies has become more oriented to learning theory (Volāne, 2015). From 2011 Sweden changed the name of *home economics* to *home and consumer studies* to better meet the expectations of the consumer society (Håkansson, 2015). Also, home economics education in Estonia has changed (Taar, 2015). Already in 1996, the content of home economics was widened, now it was more than just practical food preparation and household works. New topics like consumer issues, nutrition, etiquette and food safety have been added to the syllabus over the years. Today, learning in home economics is associated with everyday life and real life problems. A major change in the 2011 curriculum was making home economics compulsory for all students (although in a different scope). In addition, curriculum (National Curriculum..., 2014) emphasizes that boys and girls can according to their interests freely choose in which thematic group (handicraft and home economics or technology studies) they want to learn (Taar, 2015). Named shifts reflect also the changes in the target of this subject, meaning that it is no longer educating women and future housewives; instead it educates responsible, capable and independent citizens. Yet another change is seen in the amount of lessons. While previously teachers could decide how much time they would concentrate on home economics issues, the mandatory number of lessons for home economics topics are now required in the curriculum (National Curriculum..., 2014).

The changes in the curriculum may involve two kinds of challenges. Firstly, although the re-balancing is an essential feature of curriculum innovation that keeps important topical themes and drops out themes that are no longer sustained, new content is added to teaching practices too often without clearing away some of the old (Martin, 1998). Latter seems to be the case also in Estonia. While the content of the subject in the curricula has changed over years, teachers add new content to their existing teaching plans and are displeased as it is impossible to achieve all. Secondly, “those involved with curriculum change are genuinely committed to internal change” (Martin, 1998) and therefore, the image of the field is assumed to be self-transforming. “This is naively optimistic and ignores all the persistent factors which form the image, negotiate the relationships between subject areas and make up the institutional culture” (Martin, 1998, 40-41).

Based on named challenges there is a gap between the content of the subject in curriculum and in the real lesson of home economics. National curriculum (National curriculum..., 2014) in Estonia defines home economics broadly. In reality, the content of a subject seems to be more limited. Practical cooking activities are dominant in home economics lessons based on the author’s connections with home economics teachers and on the study (Randla, 2012) about the implementation of new curriculum (National curriculum..., 2014). As home economics is taught in combination with handicraft – and textile works take more time – it is not possible to cover all topics in home economics (Randla, 2012). Thus, practical skills are trained and more theoretical aspects of the subject are left aside. In addition, M. Randla (2012) points out that the content of home economics in the curriculum is too declarative and teachers’ interpretations of what to teach are therefore too different from each other.

At the same time, attempts to make changes in teaching are always implicated in teachers’ own orientations to their subjects (Williamson, Morgan, 2009). R. Patrikainen (1999) explains that teachers’ understandings of the societal developments and the curriculum create the basis of teachers’ view about significant knowledge of student and how it should be learned. So, teachers are taken as professionals who can decide what the most appropriate content is for their students in particular school’s subject. It is interesting to see in Estonian context, where handicraft and home economics is taught in conjunction by the same teacher, how teachers passion and commitment (Cameron, Mercier, 2016) influence their choices of what topics to handle. If teachers are more interested in handicraft topics they pick learning tasks that are related with textile, while being more attracted on topics of home economics, they find more possibilities (despite time related, physical and material challenges) for these lessons. Although decisions affect the lesson inside one school, teacher’s choice projects the image of the school subject for the wider community (Jephcote, Davies, 2007). Therefore, it is important to bring forward teachers’ responsibility in designing the external image of a school subject.

The image of home economics education in Estonia has not been studied. The content and goals of this subject have changed within last decades. Although, the name of the subject home economics came visible in 1996 it is still misused in writings and discussions between different parties (teachers, students, parents, school leaders). In addition, it can be expected, that it's hard for teachers to orientate and take a stand in the subject's name as well as content considering the constant changes through history. School as an institution is slow in implementing changes. Based on hereinbefore, it may be expected that the description in the curriculum and the reality in the school lesson are not equivalent. Therefore, the goal of this study was to find out what is the official name of this school subject that is presented on schools' web pages. The name of a school subject is a symbol that makes up social reality and reflects the image of home economics by members of school community. Schools' web pages are official channels to inform parents as well as society about how the learning process occurs in schools. Although the interest was to study home economics' image, findings are presented together with the aspects about the area of handicraft as these subjects are taught in collaboration in Estonia.

Methodology

Document analysis (Altheide, 1996) was used in this study for mapping the information related with home economics education on all schools' web-pages in Estonia. Based on D.L. Altheide (1996) definition of a document, it can be any symbolic representation that can be recorded or retrieved for analysis. All schools in Estonia have their own web pages that can be retrieved and most schools use this to present the list of teachers' names together with the subject(s) names they teach. All schools web pages as documents were visited in June and July 2016 and information related with handicraft and home economics teachers were saved into MS Excel table for further analysis.

The state portal (*eesti.ee*) was taken as the basis for getting information about the school types and numbers in different counties in Estonia. Altogether 492 schools web pages were searched and/or visited from 15 counties. Pages that did not open were revisited in October 2016. Information was not available on 47 web pages. These pages had technical problems, they did not give information about single school subjects or the school did not have website. In addition, there are 87 schools where handicraft and home economics lessons are not compulsory by national curriculum – for example, in schools for students with special needs; in high schools; in “night schools” for adults; or in kindergarten-primary schools. Therefore, information from 358 schools was included into the analysis.

Gathered information was systemized and analysed according to the content. The main aim was to find out what is the name of a particular school subject on different schools' web pages.

Result and discussion

As expected, the results were variegated. Altogether 14 different names for the school subject were used in schools' websites. For the better overview names with slight differences were combined in this study, leaving 9 unlike versions. Results are presented in Table 2.

Finding so many various names on schools' web pages supports G. Martins' (1998) claim that there is little attention on how a school subject is perceived by outsiders. As seen from Table 1, through history there has not been consistency in the name of this subject area. It is understandable that those responsible for updating schools' home pages might not be totally familiar with the development of the curriculum and therefore the names are presented incorrectly. Those related with this subject area should keep an eye on the public information that is also part of the image projection.

Following, the results are opened according to Table 2. The interpretations of the reasons are done based on authors' experiences from working on the field and on the theoretical literature with the purpose to open the background for the reader. Based on this study, it is impossible to claim what are the exact reasons behind the development of the subject's name.

The correct name of the subject handicraft and home economics (*käsitöö ja kodundus*) was used on 125 (36 %) schools' web pages, that is only one third of studied schools. The situation differed significantly in various counties in Estonia. For example, 58 % of schools in Valgamaa, 45 % in Viljandimaa and 44 % in Harjumaa have written the name of this subject in a correct way. It is hard to predict what can be the relation why these three counties provide the information most accurately. These counties situate

in different parts of Estonia. In Harjumaa, the population is the biggest and there is the biggest number of schools (122), while Valgamaa and Viljandimaa are much smaller (accordingly 20 and 27 schools). At the same time, there are no correct name on the web pages in Hiiumaa and only 8 % in Jõgevamaa.

Table 2

School subjects' names on schools' web pages

Name in English	Name on the web page (in Estonian)	% of all names
Handicraft and home economics	<i>Käsitöö ja kodundus</i> <i>Käsitöö, kodundus</i> <i>Kodundus ja käsitöö</i> <i>Kodundus, käsitöö</i>	36
Handicraft	<i>Käsitöö</i>	32
Craft	<i>Tööõpetus</i>	15
Handicraft for girls	<i>Tütarlaste käsitöö</i>	7
Craft for girls	<i>Tütarlaste tööõpetus</i> <i>Tööõpetus (tüdrukud)</i>	6
Handicraft and home economics for girls	<i>Tütarlaste käsitöö ja kodundus</i>	1
Home economics	<i>Kodundus</i>	1
Technology studies for girls	<i>Tütarlaste tehnoloogiaõpetus</i> <i>Tütarlaste töö- ja tehnoloogiaõpetus</i>	1
Technology studies	<i>Tehnoloogiaõpetus</i>	1

Slightly less represented was the name handicraft (*käsitöö*) that was found from 33 % of all schools' web pages. Handicraft as the name of this school subject was most often used in 7 counties out of 15 (e.g. 65 % of the schools in Võrumaa, 54 % in Lääne-Virumaa and 50 % in Jõgevamaa). All 5 schools on the small island Hiiumaa used the name Handicraft that is half-right and stands only for one side of this subject, leaving home economics aside. There may be several reasons for this phenomenon. At first, as the curricula on 1996 and 2002 handled handicraft and home economics as two subjects that were taught in combination (in Table 2 written as "handicraft, home economics" in comparison with "handicraft and home economics"), teachers used the name that was more correct in their schools. Teachers who did not have proper conditions for organizing home economics lessons left these topics of the subject aside and taught only handicraft. Secondly, handicraft has long traditions in Estonia and this overshadows home economics (Taar, 2015). Thirdly, the age of an average Estonian teacher is 48 years and the average teaching experience is 22 years (Übius, Kall, 2014). It is predictable, that a considerable number of teachers have got their education before the major changes in the curricula in 1996. It means that handicraft and home economics teachers are trained to become craft teachers for girls and it is challenging for them to make changes in their teaching practices. Fourthly, semantic influences may cause the use of abbreviation. The name handicraft and home economics is too long to use in everyday discussions. Therefore, shortened versions are used and as confirmed by K. Aava (2010), if the words are used often, it makes them unquestionable. Another side of this phenomenon is also in use. 5 (1,5 %) schools in Estonia use the limited name home economics to present this school subject. Based on J. Cameron, K. Mercier and S. Doolittle (2016) view teachers' passion is in strong connection with their choices of what topics to handle in the lesson. Therefore, it may be predicted, that home economics is more liked by 1,5 % of the teachers in this subject area.

The name craft (*tööõpetus*) is still widely in use. It is found on 15 % of all schools' web pages in Estonia. This name is mostly used in Ida-Virumaa (40 %) and Viljandimaa (30 %). Although, on the schools' websites in some counties craft as a name is not used (in Hiiumaa, Jõgevamaa, Valgamaa and Lääne-Virumaa). The biggest usage of the name craft in Ida-Virumaa might be related with the fact that this part is the only area where Estonians are a minority, under 20 %. In the cities of Narva and Sillamäe they are even less than 5 % (Tiit, Servinski, 2013). Russian background may influence using the name from Soviet time. Another, historical reason might be that there is a misunderstanding in relation with the concept of the word craft. Considering the diversity of the name (Table 1), the results of this study

are not giving an understanding if the names on the web pages at this moment are used in a wrong way or these have just stayed unchanged.

Partial changes are seen in names like handicraft for girls (*tütarlaste käsitöö*; 7 % of all names) and handicraft and home economics for girls (*tütarlaste käsitöö ja kodundus*; 1 %), although the reference on gender has remained. Linguistically, it is old-fashioned to use the word “*tütarlaste*” (it means girl but can not be used equally). The word “*tütarlaste*” comes from 1930s and remained to be used during Soviet times. For craft (*tööõpetus*) lessons students were divided into two groups according to their gender. These groups were named as craft for girls (*tütarlaste tööõpetus*) and craft for boys (*poeglaste tööõpetus*) (Kaheksaklassilise kooli..., 1976). During that time the system was straightforward, girls took textile lessons and boys wood lessons. When the names handicraft and home economics were first used in the curriculum of 1996, the reference for gender was no longer added in the official name of this school subject. Therefore, it was surprising to see that schools indicate to the gender even now, 20 years after the change was made. Although, the latest curriculum states clearly that organizing groups must not be related with gender, it may be hard for teachers to change their thinking after so many years of self-evident system. Therefore, remarks for gender may be found from the data. Even the pure example of the subjects' name in the Soviet time can be found. 6 % of all Estonian schools' websites use the subjects name craft for girls.

While it was predictable to find previously accepted names still in use, it was surprising to see versions of subjects' names that have never been in official use. As an example, technology studies; technology studies for girls; and craft and technology studies for girls. The name technology study is valid for wood and metal lessons in current curriculum, while craft and technology studies were used similarly in the last curriculum. It is incomprehensible why it is used in the context of handicraft and home economics. It seems like the names of two subjects are unfoundedly reconciled on schools' web pages.

Based on the findings, it is seen that home economics is hidden. According to J. Cameron, K. Mercier and S. Doolittle (2016) teacher's passion and commitment influence her choices of what topics to handle. This claim can be transposed into the context of handicraft and home economics in Estonia. Seeing handicraft dominating over home economics allows to expect that Estonian handicraft and home economics teachers are more passionate about the topics of handicraft. This is explained by teachers' educational background and by the fact that handicraft has strong traditions in Estonia.

As seen from the overview of the development of curriculum (Table 1) the name of the subject has been constantly changing. These changes have left its mark also on the schools' websites (Figure 1).

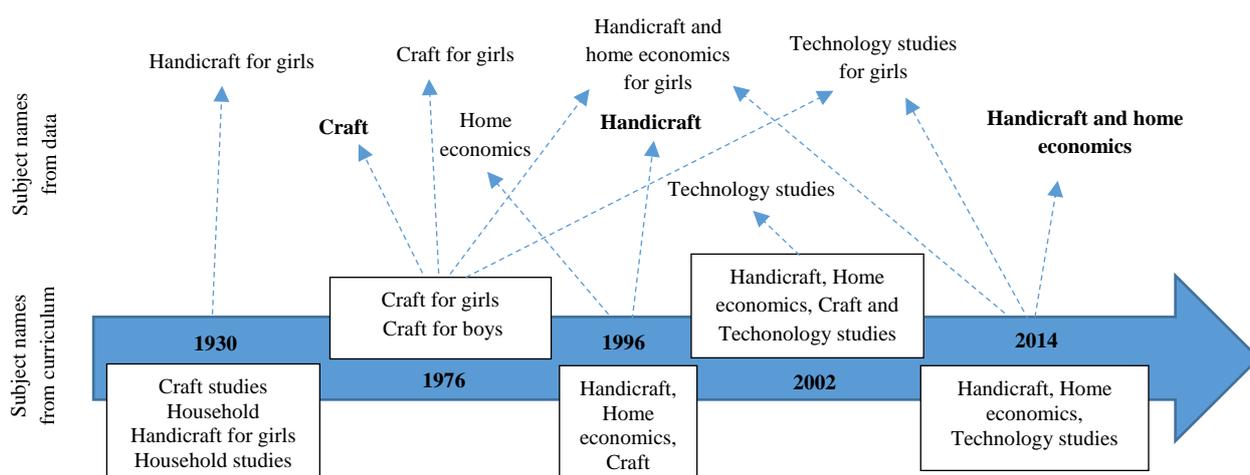


Figure 1. Subjects names on schools' websites in relation with the period where they possibly originate.

Based on G.A. Martin's (1998) statement, teachers work within a subject area which continually re-invents itself. School subjects need to develop in time. Although, subject's name does not necessarily need to be modified with every development in the curricula. Innovations in the name should come along with the major changes in the subject as seen in 1996 when the content of the subjects was

widened. Nevertheless, teachers constantly need to pay attention “to the fit between the internal changing reality and the perceptions of outsiders” (Martin, 1998). The change starts from the inside. Image of a school subject is a symbol that is projected through the statements and all field related activities of teachers and students (in schools and outside) as well as in the milieu that they create. When teachers make developments in their teaching practice and students’ learning, they also need to keep an eye on how developments are seen from outside. Because, “if there is a lack of attention to projecting an accurate image, then the image will be formed by other forces and these will bear the value systems which hold allegiance to other fields of study” (Martin, 1998, 41).

The findings of this study raise the question how the name of the school subject can be so diverse? School subjects’ name is one of the important elements of the image. The name should present fair and complete content of the subject. As seen from the findings, 64 % of the names presented on schools’ web pages are not correct and some versions display the subject only partly. The presentation of the subject handicraft and home economics is disorganized in schools’ web pages and this leaves careless impression. How can handicraft and home economics be positioned in relation to other school subjects if its image is not clearly understandable? How can image give an adequate input for the curriculum development if the image is one-sided?

It is not known how well are teachers informed about the information on schools’ web page and how much they are involved with the development of these sites. Nevertheless, if they are not able to change the information on the web pages they should send the necessary information to those responsible for administrating websites. The information given on school’s website creates the image of the school’s subjects but, in addition, this information is also personal as it displays the image of the teacher. If teachers are not interested about the subject’s image they could at least be interested about the image of themselves.

Conclusion

In conclusion, if image is believed to refer to the needs of individual and organizational developments, it may be said that handicraft and home economics teacher as well as school’s web manager need to be better informed about the importance and influences of the image of a school subject. Teachers are concentrating on the inner developments of the subject without being aware that they also create the image of the subject. Without this knowledge, they are likely to make any changes.

Now, when knowing how handicraft and home economics is presented officially by schools’ web pages, it is seen that results are colourful. More various names could be seen in the oral talk, where adaptations, jargon and slang is used. Therefore, it is needed to study what names are in use by different stakeholders – students, teachers and parents. In addition, it would be interesting to get teachers’ response to the findings of this study. How teachers feel themselves about the image of home economics and what is their opinion about the role in the projection of the image of home economics.

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