

MATERNAL OCCUPATION AND NUTRITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AS CORRELATES OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN HOME ECONOMICS IN ETSAKO EAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EDO STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated the maternal occupation and nutritional knowledge as correlates of academic performance of secondary school students in Home Economics in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State. Two hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance in the study. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study comprised of 4,865 junior secondary school students in all the 16 public junior secondary schools in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State. A sample size of 200 students was selected from the population using the simple random sampling technique. Two instruments were used for data collection: The Maternal Occupation and Nutritional Knowledge Questionnaire (MONKQ) and the Home Economics Academic Performance Test (HEAPT). The data collected were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at a .05 level of significance. The study revealed that there is a significant relationship between mothers' nutritional knowledge and students' academic performance in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State and there is a significant relationship between maternal occupation and the academic performance of students in Home Economics in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others that schools and community health programs should organize workshops and awareness campaigns to educate mothers on proper nutrition and its impact on children's learning as this will equip mothers with the knowledge needed to support their children's dietary needs, ultimately improving academic performance.

Keywords: *Maternal Occupation, Nutritional Knowledge, Determinants, Academic Performance, Secondary School Students, Home Economics*

Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a vital tool for personal and national development, as it equips individuals with knowledge, skills, values and competencies necessary for effective participation in society. In contemporary times, education has been linked to economic growth, technological advancement and social transformation. UNESCO (2021) emphasized that quality education enhances human capital development and improves productivity and life outcomes. Academic performance, which reflects the extent to which educational objectives are achieved, is often used as a key indicator of educational effectiveness and students' cognitive attainment. However, students' academic performance is influenced by multiple factors, including family background, socio-economic status, and parental characteristics.

The Nigerian education system is structured into basic, secondary and tertiary levels, guided by the National Policy on Education. The system adopts the 9-3-4 structure, which consists of nine years of basic education, three years of senior secondary education, and four years of tertiary education. The policy emphasizes functional education aimed at producing self-reliant individuals capable of contributing to national development. Secondary education, in particular, occupies a strategic position as it prepares students for higher education and equips them with vocational and entrepreneurial skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2013). In recent times, reforms in the system have focused on improving quality, relevance and skill acquisition among learners.

Nigerian secondary education has witnessed significant curriculum reforms, especially with the integration of vocational subjects. This development was driven by the need to address unemployment and promote skill acquisition among youths. Vocational subjects such as Home Economics, Agriculture and Technical Drawing were introduced to provide students with practical knowledge and life skills. According to contemporary educational reforms, vocational education is essential for national development as it fosters creativity, innovation and self-reliance among students (Imoede & Iria, 2025). These subjects are designed not only to enhance theoretical understanding but also to equip learners with practical competencies that can be applied in real-life situations.

Home Economics as one of the core vocational subjects, plays a significant role in improving family and societal well-being. It focuses on areas such as food and nutrition, clothing and textiles and home management. The subject aims to equip students with practical skills for effective home management, healthy living, and income generation. The objectives of Home Economics include developing skills in resource management, promoting proper nutrition and healthy lifestyles, and fostering entrepreneurial abilities among learners (Dirisu, 2025). Given its practical nature, students' academic performance in Home Economics is influenced not only by school-related factors but also by home and family conditions.

Academic performance refers to students' level of achievement in educational tasks, often measured through tests, examinations, and continuous assessments. Studies have shown that students' academic success is significantly influenced by parental factors, particularly those related to mothers who often serve as primary caregivers. Maternal nutritional knowledge is believed to play a crucial role in shaping children's health and cognitive development. Maternal nutritional knowledge refers to a mother's understanding and awareness of proper dietary practices, including knowledge of balanced diets, food groups, nutrient requirements, food preparation and feeding practices necessary for maintaining good health. It also encompasses the ability to make informed decisions about food choices that promote the physical and cognitive development of children (Wilson, 2025).

Mothers with adequate nutritional knowledge are more likely to provide balanced meals, thereby improving children's health status, concentration and academic performance (FAO, 2019; UNICEF, 2020). In Nigerian, maternal nutritional knowledge has been linked to better child growth outcomes and improved learning capabilities, as proper nutrition supports brain development and cognitive functioning (Omachi, et al., 2024). It is perceived that mothers' knowledge of nutrition significantly affects children's nutritional outcomes and overall well-being, which are critical for learning and academic performance. It is believed that proper nutrition enhances brain development, concentration and memory, thereby improving students' ability to perform academically.

In addition, maternal occupation is another important factor influencing students' academic performance. Maternal occupation refers to the type of work or economic activity a mother

engages in, whether formal or informal, which contributes to household income and socio-economic status. It includes professions such as civil service, trading, farming, and self-employment, as well as full-time homemaking. Maternal occupation plays a significant role in shaping children's academic outcomes, as it influences the availability of financial resources, time for supervision and the overall learning environment at home. Eze, et al. (2021) noted that employed mothers may provide better educational resources due to higher income, while unemployed or less engaged mothers may offer more direct supervision of children's academic activities (OECD, 2018). Thus, maternal occupation remains a critical factor in understanding variations in students' academic performance. Maternal occupation could determine the socio-economic status of the family, availability of learning resources and the level of supervision provided to children. Teslim (2025) asserted that working mothers provides better financial support for educational materials, while non-working mothers may have more time to monitor their children's academic activities. It is perceived that maternal characteristics such as maternal occupation and maternal nutritional knowledge are closely linked to children's developmental and educational outcomes. Therefore, the relationship between maternal occupation, nutritional knowledge, and students' academic performance in Home Economics is complex but significant, warranting further investigation, particularly within the context of secondary schools in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State.

Statement of the Problem

The persistent poor academic performance of secondary school students in Home Economics has become a deeply troubling issue particularly in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State. Despite the inclusion of Home Economics in the secondary school curriculum to equip students with practical life skills and promote self-reliance, many students continue to perform below expectations in both internal and external examinations. This situation is not only disheartening but also alarming, as it undermines the very objectives of vocational education in Nigeria. Classrooms that should produce skillful and self-reliant individuals are instead witnessing repeated failure, lack of interest and poor mastery of basic concepts, leaving students ill-prepared for both higher education and everyday life challenges.

More distressing is the fact that this poor academic performance appears to be closely linked to factors within the home, particularly those associated with mothers who are primary caregivers. In many households, inadequate maternal nutritional knowledge has resulted in poor feeding practices, leading to malnutrition, low energy levels, poor concentration and reduced cognitive functioning among students. A child who goes to school hungry or poorly nourished is naturally disadvantaged in learning. At the same time, the increasing economic pressure on families has forced many mothers into demanding occupations that limit the time and attention they can devote to their children's academic activities. Consequently, students are left without proper guidance, supervision, and emotional support, further compounding their academic struggles.

The situation becomes even more pathetic when one considers that these students are expected to excel in a subject like Home Economics, which is directly connected to nutrition, health, and home management areas where their immediate home environment may already be lacking. The irony is painful as students are taught principles of good nutrition and effective home management in school, yet return to homes where such principles are scarcely practiced or understood. This disconnect creates a cycle of poor academic performance and limited practical application of knowledge. If this trend is not urgently addressed, it may continue to produce a generation of students who are academically weak, nutritionally disadvantaged, and inadequately

prepared for meaningful contributions to society, thereby posing serious implications for both educational development and national growth. Flowing from the above, the study seeks to investigate the maternal occupation and nutritional knowledge as correlates of academic performance of secondary school students in Home Economics in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State.

Purpose of the Study

The specific purpose of the study were to:

- a. ascertain the relationship between maternal occupation and academic performance of students in Home Economics in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State
- b. examine the relationship between maternal nutritional knowledge and students' academic performance in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State

Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on the 1979 Ecological Systems Theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner 1979. The theory explains human development as a complex interaction between the individual and multiple environmental systems that influence behavior and outcomes. According to Bronfenbrenner, a child's development is shaped by nested systems, namely the microsystem (immediate environment such as family and school), mesosystem (interactions between immediate environments), exosystem (external environments that indirectly influence the child, such as parents' workplace), and macrosystem (broader cultural and societal values). This theory emphasizes that the family, particularly parents, plays a critical role in shaping a child's cognitive, emotional, and academic development.

The Ecological Systems Theory further posits that factors within the child's immediate environment, especially parental characteristics and behaviors, have direct and significant impacts on learning outcomes. Maternal attributes such as occupation and nutritional knowledge exist within the child's microsystem and exosystem, influencing both the quality of care and the availability of resources for learning. A mother's occupation may affect the time spent supervising academic activities, while her nutritional knowledge directly influences the child's health, energy level, and cognitive functioning. The interaction of these environmental factors determines the overall developmental outcomes of the child, including academic performance in school subjects such as Home Economics.

The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in its ability to explain how maternal occupation and nutritional knowledge, as components of the child's immediate environment, influence students' academic performance in Home Economics. It provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how home-related factors interact with educational processes to shape learning outcomes. By applying this theory, the study can better examine the extent to which maternal characteristics contribute to variations in students' academic performance.

Maternal Nutrition Knowledge and Academic Performance of Students

Maternal nutritional knowledge refers to a mother's understanding of food, nutrients, and their importance in supporting the growth and development of her child. It involves knowledge of food types, quality, and appropriate combinations required to meet the body's needs such as energy, growth, and tissue repair. Since mothers are primarily responsible for food selection and preparation in most households, their knowledge significantly determines children's dietary intake, which in turn affects their physical health and cognitive development. Consequently, adequate maternal nutritional knowledge promotes balanced diets that enhance children's learning ability,

while poor knowledge may lead to malnutrition, reduced concentration, and poor academic outcomes.

Nutrition plays a vital role in achieving optimal health, as the body depends on nutrients obtained from food to function effectively. Mothers, as primary caregivers, are responsible for making informed feeding decisions, including the type, quality, and timing of meals. Studies have suggested that maternal socio-economic characteristics and knowledge significantly influence children's nutritional status and well-being (Appoh, et al., 2005). Adequate nutrition improves children's energy levels, alertness, and participation in classroom activities, whereas poor nutrition exposes them to illness and cognitive deficiencies that negatively affect academic performance.

However, empirical findings on the relationship between maternal nutritional knowledge and students' academic performance remain inconsistent. For instance, Farhana, et al. (2024) reported a strong and significant relationship between mothers' nutritional knowledge and students' academic performance, with knowledge accounting for a substantial proportion of variation in performance. Similarly, Mawada, et al. (2025) found that well-nourished children performed significantly better than malnourished ones, suggesting that nutritional factors directly influence learning outcomes. These studies support the argument that maternal nutritional knowledge enhances children's academic performance by improving their health and cognitive functioning.

Contrarily, several studies reported no significant relationship between maternal nutritional knowledge and academic performance. Olatona, et al. (2024), Akeredolu, et al. (2019), Yabanc, et al. (2019), and Gichana (2019) all found that maternal nutritional knowledge did not significantly predict students' academic performance despite mothers possessing some level of awareness. The disagreement between these findings and those of Farhana, et al. (2024) and Mawada, et al. (2025) may be attributed to differences in research context, measurement of variables, and intervening factors. While some studies focused directly on academic performance, others examined nutritional knowledge without adequately accounting for actual feeding practices, which may weaken the observed relationship.

Furthermore, socio-economic conditions may moderate the relationship between maternal nutritional knowledge and academic performance. Even when mothers possess adequate knowledge, financial constraints may limit their ability to provide balanced diets, thereby reducing the impact of knowledge on children's academic outcomes. This position is supported by Asiegbu and Fadupin (2024), who found that maternal nutritional knowledge significantly improved childcare practices, although its direct effect on academic performance was not established. Similarly, Komala, et al. (2023) concluded that while no significant statistical relationship existed, maternal nutritional knowledge remains important for children's nutritional well-being. The inconsistencies in empirical findings suggest that maternal nutritional knowledge alone may not directly determine students' academic performance but may exert an indirect influence through nutritional status, health, and caregiving practices. This indicates a gap in the literature, as many studies have not sufficiently examined the combined or mediating effects of these variables, thereby justifying the need for further investigation.

Maternal Occupation and Academic Performance of Students

Mothers, as primary caregivers, play a crucial role in children's socialization and educational development, with their occupation influencing both the home environment and academic outcomes (Adekey, 2020). Maternal occupation affects students' academic performance through multiple pathways, including income level, time availability, supervision, and access to educational resources. Studies generally indicate a positive relationship between maternal

occupation and students' academic performance. Mudassir and Abubakar (2020) found that students whose mothers were engaged in formal occupations performed better academically due to improved financial support and exposure. Similarly, Mala and Mohammed (2022), Abubakar and Musa (2024), and Kaniz (2024) reported that parental occupation significantly predicts academic performance, largely because it determines access to educational materials and learning opportunities. These findings suggest that maternal occupation enhances academic performance by improving the socio-economic status of the family.

However, other studies highlight the negative or mixed effects of maternal occupation. Oyenyin (2020) observed that children involved in their mothers' economic activities, such as farming, often miss school and develop poor academic attitudes, which negatively affect performance. Similarly, Thomas and David (2023) noted that while working mothers may provide better financial resources, limited time for supervision and academic support may reduce students' engagement with schoolwork. These findings suggest that the benefits of maternal occupation may be offset by reduced parental involvement in children's education.

The divergence in findings can be explained by differences in the nature and conditions of maternal occupation. Formal and stable occupations tend to provide financial benefits without excessively limiting time for childcare, whereas informal or labor-intensive occupations may demand more time and involve children in economic activities, thereby negatively affecting their schooling. This explains why Mudassir and Norsuhaily (2024) found that students whose parents had formal occupations performed better than those whose parents were engaged in informal work. Additionally, maternal occupation influences academic performance through its impact on children's motivation and aspirations. Studies such as Zoramsanga, et al. (2024) and Anagbogu (2012) indicate that mothers serve as role models, shaping children's attitudes toward education and achievement.

However, Sadiq and Suleiman (2025) argued that while occupation influences socio-economic class and access to opportunities, it does not fully explain differences in academic performance, suggesting the presence of other contributing factors such as school quality and individual ability. The literature revealed that maternal occupation has a complex and multidimensional relationship with students' academic performance. While most studies agree on its significance, they differ on the direction and strength of its influence due to variations in occupational type, socio-economic context, and parental involvement. This inconsistency highlights the need for further research to examine how maternal occupation interacts with other variables, such as nutritional knowledge, in influencing students' academic outcomes.

Methods

The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study comprised of 4,865 junior students in all the 16 public junior secondary School in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State. The sample size of the study was made of 200 students. The simple random sampling technique was used to select 10 public secondary schools and in each of the selected schools, 20 students were selected and this gave a total sample size of 200 students.

Two instruments were used for data collection; The Maternal Occupation and Nutritional Knowledge Questionnaire (MONKQ) and Home Economic Performance Test (HECPT). The Maternal Occupation and Nutritional Knowledge Questionnaire (MONKQ) contained 20 items which were on a five-point Likert scale of Strongly Agreed-5, Agreed-4, Undecided-3, Disagreed-2, and Strongly Disagreed-1. In the same vein, the Home Economic Performance Test (HECPT) contained 50 items and were rated on a scale of A-5, B-4, C-3, D-2, E-1.

The instruments were validated by two experts in Home Economics in the Department of Vocational and Technical Education, Faculty of Education, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State using face and content validity techniques. To ensure the reliability of the instruments, a pilot study was conducted using the split-half method. For the Maternal Occupation and Nutritional Knowledge Questionnaire (MONKQ) and HECPT, 30 students in private secondary schools in Etsako East Local Government Area, Edo State were used. The items were divided into odd and even numbers and the reliability coefficient was determined using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation (Spearman Rho), yielding a coefficient of .74 for MONKQ and .78 HECPT respectively, indicating that the instruments were reliable. The researchers, with the assistance of two trained research assistants, administered 200 copies of the questionnaire to the selected respondents.

The hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at a .05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between maternal occupation and academic performance of students in Home Economics in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State.

Table 1

Relationship between Maternal Occupation and Academic Performance of Students in Home Economics in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State

Variable	N	X	SD	Pearson(r)	Sig. value	Remark
Maternal Occupation		2.59	.493			
Academic Performance	200	2.82	.382	.612	.045	Significant (p<.05) Ho rejected

**Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).*

In Table 2, the r coefficient value of .612 was significant at .05 level of significance (P<.05). Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicated that there is significant relationship between maternal occupation and the academic performance of students in Home Economics in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between mothers' nutritional knowledge and students' academic performance in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State.

Table 2

Relationship between Mothers' Nutritional Knowledge and Students' Academic Performance in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State

Variable	N	X	SD	Pearson(r)	Sig. value	Remark
Mothers' Nutritional Knowledge		2.77	.442			
Students' Academic Performance	200	2.82	.282	.775	.015	Significant (p<.05) Ho rejected

** Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).*

Table 2 shows that the calculated value of r of .775 was significant at .05 level of significance (P<.05). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This meant that there was a significant relationship between mothers' nutritional knowledge and students' academic performance in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State.

Discussion of Findings

There is a significant relationship between maternal occupation and the academic performance of students in Home Economics in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State. This could be that maternal occupation does not directly determine how well children perform academically in Home Economics, as factors such as teaching quality, student motivation, school environment, and access to learning resources may play more critical roles than a mother's profession. It could be that irrespective of whether mothers are formally employed or not, students receive similar levels of guidance and support at home, or that mothers' occupation does not translate into direct academic engagement in Home Economics activities. This result is in consonance with Kyao and Onyango (2024) whose findings revealed that parents' occupation influences students' academic performance through learning motivation, absenteeism, child labour, and home environment. The finding of this study is also in agreement with Mudassir and Norsuhaily (2024) that students whose parents had formal occupations performed better academically than those whose parents had informal occupations. Similarly, the result of this study is in consonance with Mala and Mohammed (2022) who found out that both parents' income and occupation significantly predicted students' academic performance. The finding also aligns with Abubakar and Musa (2024) who showed a significant relationship between parents' occupation and academic performance, although income was not significant. Sadiq and Suleiman (2025) similarly reported that parental occupation, as a socio-economic indicator, determines access to educational opportunities, with wealthier parents providing better resources, though poverty alone does not fully explain performance differences.

The study showed that there is a significant relationship between mothers' nutritional knowledge and students' academic performance in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State. This could be linked to the crucial role nutrition plays in cognitive development, concentration, and overall learning ability. This result is consistent with the study of Onyi (2021) who reported that home environment significantly influences students' academic performance as students from supportive homes were more likely to share academic challenges with their mothers, and parental encouragement positively affected academic outcomes. The finding also supports that of Farhana, et al. (2024) whose study revealed that maternal nutritional knowledge accounted for 91.1% of the variation in students' academic performance, highlighting the importance of nutrition in learning. The finding of the study is in agreement with the findings of Asiegbu and Fadupin (2024) that higher maternal nutritional knowledge significantly improved childcare practices such as feeding, supervision, and healthcare, which indirectly support children's cognitive development and learning. The finding of the study is in consonance with Mawada, et al. (2025) who found that well-nourished children performed significantly better academically than malnourished ones, emphasizing the direct impact of proper nutrition on academic outcomes. The finding also supports that of Komala, et al. (2023) that maternal nutritional knowledge, although not always statistically significant, plays an important role in ensuring children's nutritional well-being, which can affect learning and performance. However, the finding of this study is not in consonance with the findings of Olatona, et al. (2024) who reported no significant relationship between maternal nutritional knowledge and students' academic performance in Lagos. The finding of this study contradicts the findings of Akeredolu, et al. (2019) that maternal nutritional knowledge was not a significant determinant of students' academic performance in Lagos State. The finding of this study is not in consonance with Yabanc, et al. (2019) who found no significant relationship between family nutritional knowledge and students' academic performance in Turkey. The finding of this study is not in agreement with Gichana (2019) who noted that although

mothers possessed some nutritional knowledge, it did not significantly influence students' academic performance in Nairobi.

Conclusion

The study concludes that there is a significant relationship between mothers' nutritional knowledge and students' academic performance in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State and that maternal occupation has a significant relationship with the academic performance of students in Home Economics in Etsako East Local Government Area.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations:

1. Schools and community health programs should organize workshops and awareness campaigns to educate mothers on proper nutrition and its impact on children's learning as this will equip mothers with the knowledge needed to support their children's dietary needs, ultimately improving academic performance.
2. Policies and programs should be developed to help mothers, regardless of occupation, manage their time and resources effectively to provide adequate academic and home support for their children as this could include flexible work arrangements, parental guidance programs, and community-based support initiatives.

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