

Parental Roles in Shaping the Nutritional Habits and Outcomes of Primary School Pupils in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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Abstract- This study investigated the roles parents play in shaping the nutritional habits and outcomes of primary school pupils in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design, data was collected from 120 parents of primary school pupils in Ado Local Government, Ekiti State, selected via purposive sampling. The research instruments, two self-designed questionnaires on food types and parental roles, demonstrated strong reliability with Cronbach Alpha coefficients of 0.76 and 0.74. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts, mean, percentage, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (T-test). Key findings revealed that a variety of foods are provided to pupils, but parents' socioeconomic status significantly influences the nutritional choices made for their children (p -value = 0.000<0.05). The study identified the high cost of healthy food as a major barrier to adequate nutrition, an issue tied to the state of the economy. While parents were found to play important roles in monitoring and educating their children on food, the research showed no significant difference between the roles parents play and the nutritional choices made for their children (p -value = 0.679>0.05). The study concludes that parental socioeconomic status is a critical factor influencing children's nutritional outcomes and that economic barriers must be addressed to improve child nutrition in the region.

Keywords: Parental Roles, Nutritional Habits, Outcomes, Primary School Pupils, Ekiti State, Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

Nutrition is a cornerstone of child development, influencing cognitive function, physical growth, immunity, and academic performance (Onabanjo, Fakoya, & Oguntona, 2021). For primary school pupils, the foundation of nutritional habits is primarily laid at home, where parents serve as gatekeepers of dietary choices. Their roles encompass food selection, preparation, education, and modelling of eating behaviours. Consequently, parental influence is critical in shaping children's nutritional outcomes

during their formative years. This connects SDG 4 (Quality Education), as good nutrition enhances pupils' ability to learn effectively.

Providing adequate nutrition to children is crucial for their overall health and development (Davis & Lopez 2023). Parents are responsible for ensuring that children have access to nutritious foods, balanced meals, and healthy eating habits. This includes meal planning, grocery shopping, cooking, and serving nutritious meals. Children have unique nutritional needs due to their rapid growth and development, making it important to offer a variety of foods that supply adequate amounts of nutrients, vitamins, and minerals (American Academy of Paediatric, 2023). Parents also play a significant role in teaching children about the importance of nutrition and making healthy food choices. This involves educating them about the benefits of different foods, the importance of eating a variety of fruits and vegetables, and the impact of nutrition on their growth, energy levels, and overall well-being. This supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Well Being), which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

In Ekiti State, Nigeria, where malnutrition seems a public health concern among school-aged children, parental responsibilities become more vital. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022), a significant proportion of Nigerian children experience stunted growth and poor dietary diversity. These nutritional deficits are often linked to inadequate parental knowledge of proper nutrition, poor feeding practices, economic constraints, and cultural food taboos (Ajayi, Ojo, & Oyetunde, 2020). This aligns with SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), which seeks to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable Agriculture.

Research has shown that parents who are actively engaged in their children's nutritional welfare tend to promote better dietary outcomes (Ezekiel & Okechukwu, 2023). This includes providing balanced meals, monitoring food intake, and creating positive food environments at home. Conversely, lack of parental involvement, especially due to work pressures or limited nutritional awareness, has been associated with increased consumption of processed and fast foods among children, which contributes to childhood obesity and related health complications (Adesanya, Musa, & Olagunju, 2022).

Parents may struggle to perform their roles in providing adequate nutrition for their children due to several intertwined factors. Economic challenges such as low income and food insecurity, may limit their ability to afford nutritious options, often pushing them toward cheaper, less healthy foods (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2022). Time constraints especially among working parents, reduce their capacity to plan and prepare balanced meals, leading to reliance on fast food or pre-packaged options. Limited nutritional knowledge also plays a role, as some parents may not fully understand the importance of balanced diets or how to make healthier choices within their budget (Freed, Singer, Gebremariam, Schultz & Clark 2021).

Cultural and social norms can influence parental behaviour, with some parents prioritizing traditional meals or foods that align with community expectations, even if they lack nutritional value. External pressures from advertising and the availability of unhealthy snacks further complicate efforts, as children may develop preferences for these foods, making it harder for parents to enforce healthier eating habits. Finally, the stress of daily life and competing priorities can diminish parents' motivation to actively engage in their children's dietary habits, reinforcing unhealthy eating patterns (Raza, Fox, & Morris, 2023).

Furthermore, the changing dynamics of modern Nigerian households—such as urbanization, dual-income parenting, and the growing influence of media—have altered traditional feeding patterns. Parents now face the dual challenge of maintaining nutritional standards while navigating time and resource constraints. As such, there is a need to

investigate how parental roles directly shape the nutritional practices and wellbeing of primary school pupils.

Given the integral role of parents in dietary decision-making, understanding their influence is essential for the development of effective school-based and community-oriented nutrition interventions. This also advances SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by encouraging equitable participation of both parents in child nutrition responsibilities. This study is therefore justified in exploring the multifaceted roles that Nigerian parents play in shaping their children's nutrition during the primary school years.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite growing awareness of child nutrition in Nigeria and particularly in Ekiti State, many primary school pupils continue to suffer from malnutrition, ranging from stunting and underweight to emerging issues of childhood obesity. Evidence points to the crucial role parents play in determining what, how, and when children eat. However, many parents lack the knowledge, time, or resources to implement healthy feeding practices. Moreover, socio-cultural beliefs and economic challenges further complicate the ability of parents to provide nutritionally adequate meals. These shortcomings in parental roles contribute significantly to poor dietary outcomes among school-aged children (Ezekiel & Okechukwu, 2023). The gap in research lies in understanding the specific ways parents influence pupils' nutrition and the extent of their involvement in dietary choices. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by critically examining parental roles in shaping the nutrition of primary school pupils.

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the roles parents play in shaping the nutritional habits and outcomes of primary school pupils in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study intends to:

- i. access the various types of food provided for primary school pupils.

- ii. investigate how parents' socio-economic status influences the nutritional choices made for primary school pupils.
- iii. identify the roles that parents play in determining the nutritional choices of primary school pupils.
- iv. investigate the barriers that affect the nutritional intake of primary school pupils.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised for this study

1. What are the types of food provided to primary school pupils?
2. How do parents socio-economic status influences the nutritional choices made for primary school pupils?
3. What are the roles that parents play in determining the nutritional choices made for primary school pupils?
4. What are the barriers that affect the nutritional intake of primary school pupils?

Research Hypotheses

H_01 : There is no significant difference in parents' socio-economic status and nutritional choices made for primary school pupils.

H_02 : There is no significant difference in roles that parents play and nutritional choices made for primary school pupils

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of parents in child nutrition has been widely studied, with consensus pointing to the home environment as a key determinant of dietary patterns (Onabanjo et al., 2021). In the Nigerian context, parental education and occupation influence their ability to provide balanced meals (Adesanya et al., 2022). However, several studies emphasize the growing challenges posed by urban lifestyles, such as reliance on convenience foods and reduced parental supervision (Ezekiel & Okechukwu, 2023). This review underlines the need for a contextualized understanding of how parents influence child nutrition.

V. METHODOLOGY

This study made use of descriptive research design of survey type. This design is appropriate because it allows the researcher to gather data from a sample population to describe existing parental practices and their influence on children's nutrition

VI. POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the study comprised of parents of primary school pupils in selected in Ado Local Government, Ekiti State.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A total of One hundred and twenty (120) primary school pupils' parents were selected using purposive sampling technique to select the parents.

Research Instruments

Two self-designed instruments were used as the research instruments: Research instrument on types of foods provided to primary school pupils and Parental role in shaping primary school pupils' nutrition. Section A contained items on socio-demographic variables of the respondents. Section B of the instruments contained items on types of foods given to primary school pupils and parental role in shaping primary school pupils nutrition.

Validity of the Instruments

To validate the research instrument, face and content validity was employed. This was done by giving sample of the questionnaire to experts in Childhood Education and nutrition. The items contained in the questionnaire were scrutinized before the questionnaires were finally administered.

Reliability of the Instruments

In order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted with 20 parents to test the reliability. The reliability was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method, a reliability coefficient of 0.76 was obtained on the types of food provided to primary school pupils while 0.74 was obtained on

parental role in shaping primary school pupils' nutrition.

while inferential statistics of T-test was used to analyzed the hypothesis formulated.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, mean and percentage Standard deviation for the research questions raised

VII. RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the types of food provided to primary school pupils?

Table 2: Frequency, Percentage, mean and standard deviation showing types of food provided to primary school pupils

S/N	Items	Daily		Weekly		Occasionally		Rarely		Mean	SD
		f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%		
	Fruits	31	25.8	55	45.8	29	24.2	5	4.2	2.93	0.82
	Vegetables	23	19.2	73	60.8	20	16.7	4	3.3	2.96	0.70
	Processed Foods	16	13.3	40	33.3	42	35.0	22	18.3	2.45	0.94
	Snacks	49	40.8	32	26.7	33	27.5	6	5.0	3.03	0.94
	Fast Foods	23	19.2	26	21.7	39	32.5	32	26.7	2.33	1.07
	Meats	36	30.0	51	42.5	29	24.2	4	3.3	2.99	0.83
	Poultries (Chicken, Turkey)	28	23.3	37	30.8	46	38.3	9	7.5	2.70	0.91
	Fishes	66	55.0	42	35.0	12	10.0	-	-	3.45	0.67
	Eggs	45	37.5	57	47.5	12	10.0	6	5.0	3.18	0.81
	Beans	10	8.3	76	63.3	29	24.2	5	4.2	2.76	0.66
	Non processed foods	9	7.5	48	40.0	46	38.3	17	14.2	2.41	0.83
	Beverages	49	40.8	45	37.5	18	15.0	8	6.7	3.13	0.90
	Average mean score								2.86		

Mean Cut-off 2.50

The result of table 1 showed frequent count, percentage, mean and standard deviation of the type of foods provided to primary school pupils. The average mean score of 2.86 is greater than the mean cut-off of 2.50. This implies that several type of foods were

provided to primary school pupils especially fishes, eggs, beverages and snacks.

Research Question 2: How do parents socioeconomic status influence the nutritional choices made for primary school pupils?

Table 3: Frequency, Percentage, mean and standard deviation showing parents socioeconomic status influence the nutritional choices made for primary school pupils

S/N	ITEMS	SA		A		D		SD		Mean	SD
		f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%		
1	My income determines the types of food I give to my children	86	71.7	27	22.5	6	5.0	1	0.8	3.65	0.62
2	The cost of living in my area affects the nutritional quality of food I provide for my child	44	36.7	39	32.5	26	21.7	11	9.2	2.97	0.98
3	I can afford to buy organic food for my child whenever I want	49	40.8	30	25.0	29	24.2	12	10.0	2.97	1.03
4	Due to financial constraints, I sometimes opt for cheaper food options for my child	41	34.2	45	37.5	15	12.5	19	15.8	2.90	1.05
5	I prioritize purchasing healthy and balanced foods for my children even if they are expensive	60	50.0	30	25.0	16	13.3	14	11.7	3.13	1.05
Average mean score										3.12	

Mean Cut-off: 2.5

The result of table 2 showed frequent count, percentage, mean and standard deviation of the parent's socioeconomic status influence the nutritional choices made for primary school pupils. The average mean score of 3.12 is greater than the mean cut-off of 2.50. This implies that parent's socioeconomic status

does influence the nutritional choices made for primary school pupils.

Research Question 3: What are the roles that parents play in determining the nutritional choices made for primary school pupils?

Table 3: Frequency, Percentage, mean and standard deviation showing the roles that the parents play in determining the nutritional choices made for primary school pupils

S/N	ITEMS	SA		A		D		SD		Mean	SD
		f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%		
1	I monitor my child's eating habits	66	55.0	29	24.2	14	11.7	11	9.2	3.25	0.99
2	I discuss with my child the nutritional benefits of foods	60	50.0	28	23.3	19	15.8	13	10.8	3.13	1.04
3	I prioritize healthy and balanced food options when planning meals for my child	56	46.7	48	40.0	11	9.2	5	4.2	3.29	0.80
4	I ensure that my child consumes a balanced diet daily	54	45.0	39	32.5	21	17.5	6	5.0	3.16	0.89
5	I am committed to being positive role model for healthy eating habits	37	30.8	52	43.3	17	14.2	14	11.7	2.93	0.96
Average mean score										3.15	

Mean Cut-off: 2.5

The result of table 3 showed frequent count, percentage, mean and standard deviation of the roles that parents play in determining the nutritional choices made for primary school pupils. The average mean

score of 3.15 is greater than the mean cut-off of 2.50. This implies that parents play very important roles in determining the nutritional choices made for primary school pupils

Research Question 4: What are the barriers that affect the nutritional intake of primary school pupils?

Table 4: Frequency, Percentage, mean and standard deviation showing barriers that affect the nutritional intake of primary school pupils

S/N	ITEMS	SA		A		D		SD		Mean	SD
		f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%		
1	The cost of healthy food is too high due to the state of the economy	73	60.8	30	25.0	16	13.3	1	0.8	3.46	0.76
2	I lack knowledge on how to prepare balanced meals for my child	20	16.7	21	17.5	33	27.5	46	38.3	2.13	1.10
3	I have limited time to prepare healthy and balanced meals for my child due to work commitments	17	14.2	38	31.7	32	26.7	33	27.5	2.33	1.03
4	I am not aware of the nutritional requirements for primary school pupils	13	10.8	51	42.5	24	20.0	32	26.7	2.38	0.99
5	I prioritize purchasing healthy and balanced foods for my children even if they are expensive	18	15.0	24	20.0	27	22.5	51	42.5	2.08	1.11
Average mean score								2.50			

Mean Cut-off: 2.50

The result of table 4 showed frequent count, percentage, mean and standard deviation of the barriers that affect the nutritional intake of primary school pupils. The average mean score of 2.50 which is equivalent to the mean cut-off of 2.50. This implies that the barriers faced by parents were moderate enough to cope with. The major barrier that affects the nutritional intake of primary school pupils is the cost

of healthy food to bear by the parents due to the state of the economy.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in parents' socioeconomic status and nutritional choices made for primary school pupils.

Table 5: Summary of t-test analysis on parents' socioeconomic status and nutritional choices made for primary school pupils.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	p-value
Parents' socioeconomic status	120	34.2833	5.45753		
Nutritional choices	120	15.6167	2.27586	34.582*	0.000

*P<0.05

Table 5 shows that p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 at 0.05 level of significant. The hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that there is significant difference in parents' socioeconomic status and nutritional choices made for primary school pupils.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the roles that parents play and nutritional choices made for primary school pupils.

Table 6: Summary of t-test analysis on the roles that parents play and nutritional choices made for primary school pupils.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	p-value
Parents Role	120	15.7750	3.51817		
Nutritional choices	120	15.6167	2.27586	0.414	0.679

P>0.05

Table 6 shows that p-value of 0.414 is greater than 0.05 at 0.05 level of significant. The hypothesis is therefore accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the roles that parents play and nutritional choices made for primary school pupils.

VIII. DISCUSSIONS

The research question 1 revealed that several types of foods were provided to primary school pupils. This is in agreement with American Academy of Paediatrics (2023), which stated that children have unique nutritional needs due to their rapid growth and development, making it important to offer a variety of foods that supply adequate amounts of nutrients, vitamins and minerals.

Also, it was revealed in research question 2 that the income of the parents determines the type of food given to their children, the cost of living in the area affects the nutritional quality of food provided for the child. Parents can afford to buy organic food for their child whenever they want. Also, due to financial constraints, parents sometimes opt for cheaper food options for their child and they prioritize purchasing healthy and balanced foods for their children even if they are expensive. This is in agreement with Adams and Mendez (2022), which stated that parents with lower socioeconomic status often struggle to provide adequate nutrition for their children. Financial constraints may limit access to nutritious foods, leading to reliance on cheaper, less nutritious options.

Furthermore, research question 3 also revealed that parents monitor their child's eating habits and they discuss with their children the nutritional benefits of foods. Also, parents prioritize healthy and balanced food options when planning meals for their children, they ensure that their children consumes a balanced diet daily and they are committed to being a positive role model for healthy eating habits. This is in agreement with Davis and Lopez (2023), which stated that parental role in providing adequate nutrition to

children is crucial for their overall health and development.

It was also revealed in research question 4, that the cost of healthy food is too high due to the state of the economy, some parents lack knowledge on how to prepare balanced meals for their child and some parents have limited time to prepare healthy and balanced meals for their children due to work commitments. Also, few parents are not aware of the nutritional requirements for primary school pupils and they prioritize purchasing healthy and balanced foods for their children even if they are expensive. This is in agreement with Adams and Mendez (2022), which stated that parents with lower socioeconomic status often struggle to provide adequate nutrition for their children. Financial constraints may limit access to nutritious foods, leading to reliance on cheaper less nutritious options. Additionally, poverty can increase stress and reduce the time parents have to prepare balanced meals.

Hypothesis 1 revealed that there is significant difference in parents' socio-economic status and nutritional choices made for primary school pupils. The findings is in line with Adams and Mendez (2021) which posited that parents with lower socioeconomic status often struggle to provide adequate nutrition for their children.

Hypothesis 2 also revealed that there is no significant difference in the roles that parents play and nutritional choices made for primary school pupils. This is in agreement with Davis and Lopez (2023), which stated that parental role in providing adequate nutrition to children is crucial for their overall health and development.

IX. CONCLUSION

Based on finding, it was concluded that several types of foods were provided to primary school pupils. Parents' socio-economic status influences the

nutritional choices made for primary school pupils. Also, parents play very important roles in determining the nutritional choices made for primary school pupils. The barriers faced by parents were moderate enough to cope with, the major barriers that affect the nutritional intake of the primary school pupils is the cost of healthy food to bear by the parents due to the state of economy. Furthermore, there is significant difference in parents' socio-economic status and nutritional choices made for primary school pupils. Also, there is no significant difference in the roles that parents play and nutritional choices made for primary school pupils.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made:

1. Parents should continue to ensure their children have access to a variety of essential foods for healthy nutrition.
2. Teachers should find effective ways to educate parents on the appropriate types of foods to provide for their children, especially when parents lack knowledge about proper nutrition.
3. The government should investigate and address barriers to nutrition, such as the economic challenges of the state, that impact the quality of food provided to pupils.
4. Government should introduce subsidies for nutritious foods and school meal programs to improve affordability for parents.
5. Community should establish food banks and community gardens to ensure access to fresh and healthy foods.

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