
Health Education in Elementary Schools: Introducing Balanced Nutrition to Elementary School Children

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the importance of health education in elementary schools, with a particular focus on introducing balanced nutrition to children. Balanced nutrition serves as the foundation for a healthy diet, which can help prevent various health issues in the future. Through creative and participatory learning approaches, including parental involvement and the use of interactive methods, children can better understand the concept of nutrition and apply it in their daily lives. Furthermore, this article identifies challenges in implementing nutrition education, such as varying levels of understanding across different regions, cultural influences, and the lack of training for educators. By addressing these challenges and strengthening collaboration among schools, parents, and communities, it is hoped that a healthier generation emerges, aware of the importance of balanced nutrition.

Keywords: health education, balanced nutrition

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1. INTRODUCTION

Health education is an essential aspect in forming healthy living habits, especially for children. Elementary school is a critical phase in a child's development, where they begin to form the mindset and behaviors that will affect their health in the future. At this age, children are highly vulnerable to environmental influences and the habits they form, making it crucial to provide appropriate health education. Therefore, it is important to provide quality health education, with a particular focus on introducing balanced nutrition.

Balanced nutrition is the foundation for physical growth and mental development in children. Proper nutrition not only supports physical growth but also plays a vital role in their cognitive and emotional development (Dewi Puspa Arum, 2024). By understanding the basic principles of nutrition, children can learn to choose nutritious foods and avoid unhealthy eating habits. Unfortunately, many elementary school children lack an adequate understanding of the importance of nutrition. This ignorance often contributes to health problems. Nutrient deficiencies, for instance, can lead to stunting, weakened immunity, and cognitive development issues. On the other hand, excess nutrition or unhealthy eating patterns can result in obesity and non-communicable diseases such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular problems (Rini Jusriani, 2023).

In a world filled with unhealthy food choices, education about balanced nutrition becomes increasingly important in helping children make better decisions. In this context, health education in elementary schools serves not only to increase children's knowledge about healthy foods but also to raise awareness of the long-term impact of their food choices. Through creative and interactive teaching methods, such as games, group projects, and hands-on activities, students can more easily understand and absorb information about nutrition. These methods not only make lessons more enjoyable but also create a deeper learning experience. Active participation in these activities enhances learning interest and helps children apply the knowledge gained in their daily lives, forming habits that will continue into adulthood.

However, challenges in implementing nutrition education in elementary schools remain. Limited resources, lack of teacher training, and insufficient parental support often become obstacles

to the successful implementation of effective health education programs. Many schools may not have the budget to hold classes or activities focused on nutrition. Additionally, teachers who are not trained in health education may find it difficult to teach this material in an engaging and informative manner. Therefore, it is crucial to explore strategies and approaches that can enhance the effectiveness of health education in elementary schools, so children can acquire the knowledge and skills needed to lead a healthy life.

By involving the community, parents, and other stakeholders, it is hoped that balanced nutrition education can become an integral part of the school curriculum. This collaborative effort will not only improve the quality of education provided but also ensure that children receive the support they need to build healthy living habits. Through comprehensive and sustainable health education, we can expect to see a healthier generation, more aware of the importance of nutrition in their lives.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method used in this research is literature review. A literature review is a research activity conducted by collecting information and data from various sources such as reference books, previous research findings, articles, notes, and journals related to the problem to be solved. The process of collecting, processing, and adjusting data is carried out systematically using certain methods and techniques to find answers to the emerging issues.

The articles reviewed are scholarly journals that meet the criteria, both in Indonesian and English, focusing on the topic of children's health education. The main data source in this research is secondary data derived from literature reviews and previous studies. The data collection techniques used include analysis of theories and findings from books, scholarly articles, and other literature, with the aim of understanding the introduction of balanced nutrition to elementary school children.

The results of the analysis are presented descriptively, providing a comprehensive overview of the introduction of balanced nutrition to elementary school children. The data collection process is carried out by searching for articles that have been published in online journals through Google Scholar and other academic sources.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Health education in elementary schools plays a crucial role in shaping children's healthy lifestyles, especially in terms of balanced nutrition. Balanced nutrition involves consuming various types of foods that the body needs to grow and develop optimally. This not only concerns the quantity of food consumed but also the type and quality of the food chosen. Introducing the concept of balanced nutrition at an early age can help children understand the importance of the food they consume and the long-term impact on their health.

Health education also serves as a model for health promotion, which has the potential to increase knowledge and change individuals' behaviors towards healthier lifestyles (Harleli, 2024). Children who receive education about balanced nutrition will be more able to recognize different food groups, such as carbohydrates, proteins, healthy fats, vitamins, and minerals. This knowledge is essential to help them make better and healthier food choices. By understanding the function of each nutrient, children can associate food with specific health benefits, such as bone strength from calcium, energy from carbohydrates, and improved immune function through vitamin intake.

Furthermore, health education equips children with practical skills, such as reading nutrition labels, planning healthy meals, and even cooking. These skills are crucial because they can boost their confidence in choosing and preparing nutritious food. By learning how to read nutrition labels, children can understand important information such as calories, fats, sugars, and other nutritional contents, which helps them make better decisions when shopping or choosing food.

The importance of health education focused on balanced nutrition is also evident in the context of preventing health problems. By understanding the basics of nutrition, children can reduce the risk of developing health issues such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, and eating disorders. Research shows that healthy eating habits formed at an early age tend to persist into adulthood, leading to positive long-term health impacts.

on practice and active student involvement. With a comprehensive approach, children not only learn about what they eat but also why these food choices are important for their health. This builds a strong foundation for a healthy lifestyle in the future.

3.1 The Importance of Balanced Nutrition

Good nutrition is a crucial foundation for the optimal growth and development of children. Adequate and balanced nutrition supports healthy physical growth, optimal brain development, as well as good emotional and social health (Solehudin, 2024). Balanced nutrition includes the intake of various types of foods rich in vitamins, minerals, proteins, healthy fats, and complex carbohydrates. Proper nutrition is vital during the child's growth period, as this is when their body and brain develop rapidly. Children who receive balanced nutrition are at a lower risk of chronic diseases later in life, such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Poor eating habits in children can lead to long-term health issues. Children who do not receive sufficient nutrition are at risk of growth and developmental disorders, and those with unhealthy eating habits are more likely to experience obesity and related diseases.

The causes of nutrition problems in school-age children include low consumption of fruits and vegetables, insufficient protein intake, and high consumption of foods and drinks high in sugar, salt, and fats, low fluid intake, and a lack of education and difficulty accessing information about balanced nutrition guidelines (Anggita Maharani, 2022). Effective nutrition education in schools can help children understand the importance of choosing healthy foods and avoiding those high in sugar and saturated fats.

Children involved in nutrition education programs at school not only increase their knowledge of nutrition but also show positive changes in their eating behavior. Children who learn about nutrition tend to make healthier food choices (Yunita Mawarni, 2024). This shows that early nutrition education interventions can have a long-term impact on children's eating habits and health.

Thus, it is important for schools to implement effective health education programs that not only provide knowledge but also practical skills in choosing and consuming healthy foods. Good nutrition education in schools can help children develop healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime.

3.2 Methods of Introducing Nutrition in Schools

Health education regarding balanced nutrition can be implemented through various innovative and engaging methods to enhance students' understanding and involvement. Some methods that can be applied in schools include:

a. Interactive Learning

Interactive learning is a highly effective method in nutrition education, using games and group activities to make the material more engaging and easier for students to understand. This method not only increases student engagement but also helps them internalize information more effectively. Through direct interaction, children can discuss, share ideas, and learn from each other, creating a dynamic and collaborative learning atmosphere. The use of interactive methods in nutrition education can enhance students' understanding of nutrition and encourage them to apply this knowledge in their daily lives.

An example of an interactive activity is the "Nutrition Bingo" game, where students are given bingo cards with various types of food and nutrient groups. When the teacher mentions the benefits or characteristics of a particular food, students must match it with the image or name of the food on their card. This activity is not only fun but also helps students remember information about food in an enjoyable way.

Another activity is group discussions, where students are divided into small groups and asked to design a poster about healthy foods. Each group can choose a theme, such as "Foods for Energy" or "Vegetables and Their Benefits." Afterward, they can present their posters to the class, explaining why the foods they chose are important for health. This activity not only improves understanding of nutrition but also develops communication and teamwork skills among students.

These examples show that students engaged in interactive learning are more likely to remember information and apply it to their food choices. With direct involvement and

enjoyable experiences, children can more easily associate knowledge about nutrition with their daily eating habits.

b. Cooking Class

Inviting students to participate in healthy cooking activities is another method in nutrition education. Cooking classes not only teach students about nutrition but also provide them with important life skills, such as meal planning, ingredient measurement, and basic cooking techniques. Through this practical experience, children not only learn about what they eat but also about how to prepare food in a healthy and enjoyable way. Cooking activities can boost students' self-confidence as they can see the fruits of their hard work in the form of delicious and nutritious dishes.

Cooking classes can also be integrated with learning about food diversity from different cultures. For example, students can be invited to learn healthy recipes from other countries and try cooking them. This activity not only introduces students to various types of food but also teaches them to appreciate other cultures and understand the importance of diversity in diet.

The skills they learn in the kitchen will equip them to live a healthy and independent lifestyle and create positive eating habits that can last a lifetime.

c. Awareness Campaign

Conducting awareness campaigns in schools is a highly effective method for increasing students' knowledge and awareness about healthy food. These campaigns can include various strategies such as using posters, brochures, and informative presentations, all designed to capture students' attention and deliver messages in an engaging way. For instance, posters are powerful visual media where the colors and messages are intended to grab students' attention (Devi Savitri Effendy, 2022). Colorful and eye-catching posters can be displayed in strategic areas around the school, such as the canteen and hallways, showing interesting facts about the benefits of consuming fruits and vegetables, as well as tips for choosing healthy food. Additionally, brochures distributed to students and parents can provide useful information on nutrition, healthy recipes, and how to make better food choices. Well-designed awareness campaigns can influence students' attitudes and behaviors toward healthy food.

d. Project-based Learning

Project-based learning is a highly effective approach to introducing nutrition to elementary school students. In this method, students are directly involved in projects related to nutrition, such as developing a school garden or planning a healthy menu. This way, children not only learn theoretically but also gain practical, hands-on experience. For example, through a school garden project, students can learn about different types of plants, the plant growth process, and how to grow vegetables. Vegetables are an important source of nutrients for body health and play a vital role in meeting daily nutritional needs (Dessy Mega Harumawati, 2024).

Students can engage in every stage of planting vegetables, from selecting seeds, preparing the soil, to caring for the plants until harvest. This activity not only teaches them about healthy food sources but also provides an understanding of diversity in their food, including the importance of vegetables and fruits.

An example of a concrete activity in project-based learning could be "Harvest Day," where students can harvest their garden's produce and host a cooking event together. During this event, they can use the ingredients they have grown to prepare healthy dishes that can be enjoyed together. Additionally, students can plan a healthy menu for the following week, where they need to consider nutritional balance, food variety, and appealing presentation. This activity can conclude with a presentation to the class, where each student group explains the benefits of the foods they chose and how they can impact health.

Through this approach, project-based learning not only enhances knowledge about nutrition but also develops teamwork, creativity, and a sense of responsibility. This method creates a comprehensive learning experience, where children can directly experience the benefits of making healthy food choices in their daily lives.

By applying these various methods, schools can create enjoyable and beneficial

learning experiences for students, enabling them to understand and apply the concept of balanced nutrition in their daily lives.

3.3 The Role of Parents and Environment

Parental involvement is crucial in supporting health education at school. When parents are involved in their children's nutrition education, children are more likely to adopt healthy eating habits. This shows that the role of parents is not limited to moral support but also includes direct teaching about the importance of proper nutrition. When parents are actively involved, they can set a good example through their own eating habits and discuss healthy food choices at home.

A supportive home environment also contributes to the success of nutrition education. A positive environment includes providing healthy food at home, such as fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious foods, and creating an atmosphere that encourages children to try new foods. Research shows that children who grow up in environments rich in healthy food choices tend to develop better eating habits. Parental involvement in selecting and preparing food can enhance children's nutrition knowledge and reinforce healthy eating habits.

In addition, open communication between parents and children regarding food and health is essential. Discussions about the benefits of healthy foods and the negative effects of unhealthy foods can help children make informed choices. Children who have good communication with their parents about nutrition are more likely to make healthy food choices and avoid unhealthy foods.

Thus, collaboration between parents, schools, and the home environment is essential in forming healthy eating habits in children. When parents take an active role in nutrition education and create a supportive environment, children will be more prepared to apply the principles of balanced nutrition in their daily lives.

3.4 Challenges in Nutrition Education

Although there are many benefits to teaching balanced nutrition, there are challenges that need to be addressed. One of them is the variation in understanding and application of nutrition concepts in different areas. There are significant differences in nutrition knowledge between children in urban and rural areas. Children in urban areas tend to have better access to nutrition information and healthy food sources, while children in rural areas often face limitations in terms of accessibility and understanding of proper nutrition.

Another challenge in nutrition education is the influence of cultural practices and long-standing eating habits. In some communities, traditional foods may not always align with the principles of balanced nutrition, and changing the mindset and eating habits that have been internalized can be difficult.

Additionally, the lack of training for educators is also a challenge in the implementation of nutrition education. Many teachers may not have sufficient knowledge of nutrition to teach the subject effectively. Teachers who are not trained in nutrition education tend to feel less confident in teaching this topic, which can affect the quality of education provided to students. Therefore, adequate training and resources for educators are essential to ensure they can deliver nutrition information accurately and engagingly.

Schools not only serve as a place to deliver material but also raise awareness among children and parents through healthy eating programs at school (Afidatur Rosyidah, 2022). Collaboration between parents and teachers in providing healthy food, offering education, and participating in related healthy eating programs demonstrates a shared commitment to creating an environment that supports the healthy growth and development of children (Oktavirani, 2024).

Thus, to address challenges in nutrition education, a holistic and collaborative approach is required. This includes involving parents, communities, and other stakeholders in designing and implementing relevant and effective nutrition education programs. Only in this way can we ensure that all children, regardless of their background, have equal access to healthy nutrition knowledge and practices.

4. CONCLUSION

Health education in primary schools, especially regarding balanced nutrition, is crucial for building a foundation of healthy eating habits in children. Educating children about balanced nutrition not only helps them understand what they consume but also shapes habits that will last a

lifetime. By involving various creative learning methods such as cooking classes, interactive learning, project-based learning, and awareness campaigns, children can more easily internalize information and apply it in their daily lives.

Parental involvement is also a key factor in the success of nutrition education in schools. When parents are actively involved, either through support at home or collaboration with teachers, children are more motivated to make healthy food choices. Through close collaboration between schools, parents, and communities, we can create an environment that supports healthy eating and an active lifestyle.

With these steps, it is hoped that we can create a healthier generation that is aware of the importance of nutrition. A generation that not only understands the value of healthy food but also has the ability to spread this knowledge to their friends and family. Through continuous and comprehensive education, we can build a strong foundation for the long-term health of children, which in turn will reduce the prevalence of diet-related diseases in the future.

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