

Perception of Parents on Influence of Planned Meal on Pupils' Performance in Early Childhood Development Centre, Ado-Ekiti

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Abstract

The study investigated parental perceived influence of planned meal on pupils' performance. It also assesses the factors influencing parents in putting nutritional knowledge into action. The study is a descriptive research of case study design. The face and content validity of the instrument was ascertained by Nutritionist and Tests, measurement and evaluation experts. A reliability co-efficient of 0.85 was obtained using split half method. The population for the study comprised all parents of children attending early childhood development education centre, Ado-Ekiti. . The sample comprised the total number of pupils' parents attending the primary school. One hypothesis was generated and tested using Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis at 0.05 level of significance. The result revealed that parents demonstrated that quality diet had positive impacts on the pupils' performance. It was recommended based on the findings that policies should be put in place that encourage or as appropriate mandate that all governments owned primary schools to have planned menu table for the pupils. Also, varieties of home based nutritious and affordable meal should be included in the menu time table.

Keywords: Pupils' Performance, Planned Meal, Knowledge.

Introduction

The early childhood period is considered to be the most important development phase throughout lifespan. Healthy early child development include the physical, social, emotional and language/cognitive domains of development. All these are equally important and strongly influence well-being, prevent obesity/stunting, improve mental health, prevent heart

disease, improve competence in literacy and numeracy. It also contributes to the reduction of criminality and encourages economic participation throughout life. Therefore, what happens to the child in the early years is critical for the child's developmental trajectory and life course (Ross, 2010).

Diet quality is strongly related to the physical and cognitive development of children. A proper diet

with adequate nutrition is of the utmost importance during critical developmental stages. In an educational world filled with failing schools and apathetic students, boards of education have searched for answers on how to increase test scores and create school systems where all students receive the best education possible. Amongst the plethora of possible solutions, is the nutritional substance of what the school-aged children are eating each day as they struggle through a day of learning. However, there is a correlation between nutrition and cognition as well as psychosocial behaviour (Ross, 2010).

Eating habits have changed over time and currently, the problem is quite the opposite; the nutritional transition has led to increased exposure of low nutrient, energy dense foods including nutritionally unbalanced snacks, convenience and fast foods resulting in high calorie, but nutrient poor diets. This nutrition transition is also being experienced by many developing nations, and is a major health concern as it has led to an increase in so-called 'diseases of affluence. (Adamo & Brett, 2013).

One of the major problems contributing to the failure of children to meet the minimum recommended servings for healthy eating is the consumption of food items that are junks, such as soft drinks, salad dressings, sugars/sweets/ preserves, fruit drinks and oils/fats. This accounts for majority of the total calorie intake in children especially during the school hour.

In the case of children, parents/guardians have been universally accepted to be primarily responsible for food procurement, choices and meal preparation. Parents can be a strong positive influence (encouraging high quality, healthful choices), or conversely, a powerful

negative influence (making easy and less healthy choices, inappropriate snacking, or heavy restriction) on diet quality. Early establishment of healthy eating behaviors is essential for children, as experts posit that attitudes towards food choice develop during childhood and play an important role in the maintenance of eating habits which influence health across the lifespan. Therefore, an unhealthy or sub-optimal diet must be identified early in childhood, in order for the proper changes to be made to improve the child's diet and prevent future disease risk. An underlying problem with this approach is the dependence on parental perception, and thus a parent must first be able to recognize when a child's diet is poor, and know how to make the necessary changes.

Many factors contribute to diet quality and it should therefore not be surprising that a parent's perception of a child's eating behaviour and diet quality may not be reflective of the true situation. Other work showed that there exists a lack of awareness and thus inaccurate perception for various health-related concepts

The eating habits and physical activity behaviours demonstrated by children are heavily influenced by their parents, who are the main "gatekeepers" of household nutrition (Wansink, 2006). Parents act as role models of food choices and food consumption, and as such, have the capacity to significantly effect change in a child's diet and food choice (Tucker, Irwin, He, Bouck, & Pollett, 2006). Therefore, to improve nutritional knowledge, intake and access to healthy foods of children, parents require access to sound nutrition information, need to adopt positive attitudes to nutrition and increase their self-efficacy to provide a healthy diet (Decker, 2012).

Schools also have the potential to play a vital role in preparing and

sustaining our students' potential learning abilities and benefitting their social behaviours by supplying nutritious breakfasts and lunches during school days. Schools and educational institutions provide a key environmental setting which facilitate actions that promote healthy choices as the norm. No matter how well teachers are prepared to teach, no matter what accountability measures are put in place, no matter what governing structures are established for schools, educational progress will be profoundly limited if students are not motivated and able to learn

Towards the realization of the objectives of the Universal Basic Education programme and the central role of nutrition, the Federal Ministry of Education launched the Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme in 2005. The overall goal of the School Feeding Programme in Nigeria is to reduce hunger and malnutrition among school children and enhance the achievement of Universal Basic Education. However, this programme has not been fully implemented, therefore, the school under study has diet plan for the pupils in the school. Based on the aforementioned, the study sought solution to this question: What are the parental perceptions of planned meal on performance of early childhood development pupils?

Purpose of the Study

The study determined the perceived influence of planned meal on performance of early childhood development centre pupils; variables such as knowledge, planned meal, pupil's performance were looked into.

Research Questions

The study sought solutions to these questions:

1. What are the parental perceived influence of planned meal on performance of Early Childhood Development pupils?
2. What are the barriers and facilitators for parents putting nutrition knowledge and planned meal into action?

Research Hypothesis

This null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance

There is no significant relationship between the parental knowledge and perception of planned meal on performance of early childhood development pupils

Method

The study is a descriptive research of case study design as it focused only on the Early Childhood Development Education Centre in Ekiti state. It is also the only government owned primary school that has a planned meal for pupils. The population consisted of parents of children attending early childhood development education centre, Ado Ekiti. Samples of 54 parents were selected using purposive sampling technique.

A self-constructed research instrument titled 'Influence of planned meal on pupils' performance was used to gather data. The face and content validity was ascertained by Nutritionist and Tests & Measurement experts. A reliability co-efficient of 0.85 was obtained using split half method. Data collected were analyzed with descriptive statistics such as the frequency count, mean and inferential statistics. Hypothesis generated was tested using Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis test at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Question 1: What are the parental perceived influences of planned meal on pupils' performance?

Table 1: Perceived influence of planned meal

ITEMS	YES F (%)	NO F (%)
A well planned meal in schools:		
Encourage enrollment in the school	42(77.8)	12(22.2)
Decrease dropout from the school	33(61.1)	21(38.9)
Ensure healthy growth and development of the child	54(100)	0(0)
Positively influence academic performance	54(100)	0(0)
Promote good eating habit	54(100)	0(0)
Promote communal feeding	54(100)	0(0)
Prevent inferiority and superiority complex among children	45(83.3)	9(16.7)
Promote equality	54(100)	0(0)
Reduces picky eating among pupils	54(100)	0(0)

The table reveals the perceived influence of planned meal in the school. Majority of the respondents (77.8%) perceived that good menu in school will encourage enrolment in the school while 22% did not agree to this. All the respondents perceived that good menu in school could ensure healthy growth and development of the child, positively influence academic performance, promote good eating habit, promote communal feeding,

promote equality and reduces or eradicate picky eating among pupils. Majority of the respondents (61.1%) claimed that good menu in school will decrease dropout from the school and 83.3% said that it will prevent inferiority and superiority complex among children.

Question 2: What are the barriers and facilitators to parents putting nutrition knowledge and the planned meal into action?

Table 2: Factors influencing the feasibility of subjecting the pupils to planned meal

Factors	Yes F (%)	No F(%)
Availability of fruits/food	54(100)	0(0)
Income/financial challenges	49(90.7)	5(9.3)
Family size	36(66.7)	18(33.3)
Difficulty of preparation of food	36(66.7)	18(33.3)
Time factors	26(48.1)	28(51.9)
Religious taboos	22(40.7)	32(59.3)
Cultural taboos	17(31.5)	37(68.5)
Attitude of parents towards menu table	40(74.1)	14(25.9)
Ignorance	27(50)	27(50)
Food or fruit scarcity	46(85.2)	8(14.8)
Media influence	31(57.4)	23(42.6)
Cost of fruits, food and snacks	41(75.9)	13(24.1)

The table shows the factors that can influence the feasibility of subjecting the pupils to planned meal. All the respondents considered

availability of fruits/ food as factor that can influence the feasibility of subjecting pupils to planned meal. Majority (90.7%) also considered

income/financial challenges and family size (66.7%) were considered as factors while 33.3% of the respondents considered difficulty of preparation of food as a factor. However, just 48.1% of the respondents considered time factor as one of the factors. Also 40.7% of the respondents considered religious taboo as a factor while just 31.5% of the respondents considered cultural taboo as a factor that can influence the feasibility of subjecting the pupils to planned meal. Attitude of parents towards menu considered was considered by 68.5% of the respondents while exactly half of the respondents (50%) claimed that ignorance can be a factor. A good

percentage (85.2%) considered food/fruit scarcity as a factor that can influence the feasibility of subjecting the pupils to planned meal. Just above average of the respondents (57.4%) considered media influence as a factor. Majority of the respondents (75.9%) considered cost of food/fruits as a factor that can influence the feasibility of subjecting the pupils to planned meal.

Testing of Hypothesis

i. There is no significant relationship between the parental knowledge and perceptions of planned meal on pupils' performance of early childhood development

Table 3: Relationship between parental knowledge and perceptions of planned meal on pupils' performance of early childhood development pupils

Variables	mean	SD	N	df	r-cal	p-value
Knowledge	2.74	0.44	54	52	-0.21	0.12
Perception of planned meal	17.00	0.80	54	-		

Table 3 shows that (-0.21) r-calculated is negative and low but significant at 0.05 level of significance; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant relationship between parental knowledge and perceptions of planned meal on performance of early childhood development pupils. The table also show that there is a negative correlation between knowledge and perception which indicates that as the knowledge is increasing, the perception of planned meal decreases or otherwise.

Discussion

Findings revealed that majority of the respondents perceived that good menu in school will encourage enrolment in the school while few did not agree to this. Adequate early childhood nutrition will improve school attendance and education

quality on the part of the pupils. This findings is affirmed by Oyefade (2014) that several factors with significant impact on many dimensions of poverty on school attendance and education quality, particularly early childhood malnutrition. All the respondents perceived that good menu in school will ensure healthy growth and development of the child, positively influence academic performance, promote good eating habit, promote communal feeding, promote equality and reduces or eradicate picky eating among pupils, this may be due to what the parents observed on their children. This agrees with the findings of Yunusa (2012) who noted that students in school feeding programmes have the potential for improving their performance because it enabled them attend school regularly and studied more effectively. Majority of the respondents claimed that good

menu in school will decrease dropout from the school and that it will prevent inferiority and superiority complex among children.

This study also revealed that all the respondents considered availability of fruits/ food as factor that can influence the feasibility of subjecting pupils to planned meal, majority also considered income/financial challenges as factor, Family size was also considered by a good percentage of the respondents as a factor. However, majority do not considered time and difficulty of preparation of food as part of the factors. This contradicts the previous findings that claimed that time constraints are proposed by numerous authors as a barrier to the provision of a healthy diet, with fast food consumption increasing, and home cooked meals decreasing (Hearst, Sevcik, Fulkerson, Pasch, Harnack, & Lytle, 2012). Also religious taboo and cultural taboo were not considered by majority as factors that can influence the feasibility of subjecting the pupils to planned meal; this may be due to the fact that none of the items on the menu table is against neither cultural nor religious practice of people involved.

Attitude of parents towards menu was considered by a good percentage of the respondents while exactly half of the respondents claimed that ignorance can be a factor. A good percentage considered food/fruit scarcity as a factor that can influence the feasibility of subjecting the pupils to planned meal; this may be due to scarcity of some food/fruit items at certain season of the year. Just above average of the respondents considered media influence as a factor. Majority of the respondents considered cost of food/fruits as a factor that can influence the feasibility of subjecting the pupils to planned meal, this is in line with numerous studies that name cost as a perceived barrier to the

provision of healthy foods (Noble, Stead, Jones, McDermott, & McVie, 2007; Stenhammar, Sarkadi, & Edlund, 2007)), but this may actually demonstrate a lack of nutritional knowledge (Turrell & Kavanagh, 2006).

There is relationship between parental knowledge and perceptions of planned meal on performance of early childhood development pupils and there is a negative correlation between knowledge and perception which indicate that as the knowledge is increasing, the perception decreases or otherwise. This show that as parents get used to the planned meal, their perception of it decreases.

Conclusion

From the findings it can be concluded that parents perceived that planned meal can positively influence performance of the child and so many factors can influence subjecting pupils to planned menu.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- Varieties of home based nutritious and affordable meal should be included in the menu time table as majority of parents consider income/ financial challenges as a factor influencing the feasibility of subjecting the pupils to planned meal.
- Government and nongovernmental organizations should provide aid financially to subsidize the cost of school feeding programme
- The planned menu table should be regularly reviewed so as to prevent poor perception on the side of the parent as their

- knowledge on planned menu increases
- Policies should be put in place that encourage or as appropriate mandate all governments owned primary schools to have planned menu table for the pupils.
- Public service announcements promoting the use of planned menu table in governments owned primary schools and its benefits should be carried out by the government and other non-governmental organization
- Intense public health campaign should be conducted on regular basis: providing importance of school feeding programme.

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