

Promoting nutrition education interventions in rural and urban primary schools in Machakos district, Kenya

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Abstract:

Although food shortage may be a leading cause of malnutrition, nutrition education interventions have proved to be equally important in addressing malnutrition. However, nutrition has to be taught in an enabling environment such as schools using available resources such as school gardens. Despite its importance, the level of nutrition knowledge among primary school children in Kenya may require improvement. This is because the coverage of nutrition in syllabus has been taking a downward trend since independence and resources such as school gardens are not actively used. This study was designed to address the gap in nutrition knowledge among school children by using school gardens to teach nutrition to primary school pupils in Iveti zone, Kathiani Division, Machakos District, a district that has reported high levels of food insecurity, malnutrition and school drop-out. A baseline survey was conducted in 15 out of 23 schools in the zone with each school having an average pupil population of 300 and 8 teachers. The sample size for the baseline survey was 350 pupils, 30 class teachers and 15 head teachers. Four primary schools out of the 15 were purposively chosen for the intervention. Two experimental and 2 control schools were selected from a rural and urban set-up. Structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, observations, pre-tests and post-tests and existing records were used to collect data from pupils, teachers and parents. The collected data was analysed by SPSS and Nutri-Survey computer packages using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Results from the intervention showed significant improvement in nutrition knowledge among pupils in experimental rural and urban schools compared to control schools. Results also showed an improvement in nutritional status among pupils. Underweight, stunting and wasting levels before the intervention were 14.5%, 28.9% and 3.9% respectively while results after the intervention showed 11.8%, 21% and 2.6% as the levels for underweight, stunting and wasting respectively. These differences were however not significant. Results further show a reduction in the level of malnutrition among pupils in control rural and urban schools. There was also improvement in practices in both rural and experimental schools that encouraged nutritious habits. These included food production, selection, preparation, consumption, preservation and sanitation. Pupils from experimental schools transferred information and skills learnt at school to the community. The intervention activities enabled the researcher come up with a module that can be vetted, pre-tested and adopted for use in similar interventions and to strengthen the teaching of nutrition education.