Nutritional Status of Intermediate Learners: Basis for Proposed Interventions

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the nutritional status of intermediate learners in San Francisco Elementary School, Concepcion West District, Tarlac Province, during the School Year 2023–2024. Specifically, it determined the learners' nutritional status based on Body Mass Index (BMI), evaluated the extent of nutrition-related activities undertaken by teachers and parents, and developed intervention measures to improve learners' nutritional status. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed involving 269 intermediate learners, with teachers and parents serving as respondents regarding nutrition-related practices. Data were gathered through a researcher-made questionnaire and analyzed using frequency, percentage, and weighted mean. Findings revealed that 73.98% of the learners had normal nutritional status, while 10.41% were overweight, 10.04% were wasted, 3.34% were severely wasted, and 2.23% were obese. Teachers' nutrition-related activities were implemented to a moderate extent (WM = 2.54), while parents likewise demonstrated a moderate extent of implementation (WM = 2.59). Despite the predominance of learners with normal BMI, both undernutrition and overnutrition remain concerns that require sustained school and family interventions. A nutrition intervention program emphasizing family-school partnerships, nutrition education, healthy eating habits, and regular monitoring is recommended to improve learners' nutritional outcomes.

Keywords: nutritional status, Body Mass Index, nutrition education, school feeding, elementary learners, parental involvement

INTRODUCTION

Proper nutrition is fundamental to children's physical growth, cognitive development, academic achievement, and overall well-being. Nutritional deficiencies and unhealthy dietary practices adversely affect learners' school participation, learning performance, and health outcomes. Consequently, the Department of Education (DepEd) continues to strengthen school health and nutrition programs through various policies and feeding initiatives designed to address malnutrition among school-aged children.

This study is anchored on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, emphasizing that health behaviors are learned through observation and interaction with one's environment, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which highlights physiological needs such as nutrition as prerequisites for learning and self-development.

Despite existing nutrition programs, cases of wasting, overweight, and obesity continue to exist among elementary learners. Understanding the nutritional status of learners and assessing the nutrition-related practices of teachers and parents are essential for designing effective school-based interventions.

Specifically, this study aimed to:

1. determine the nutritional status of intermediate learners;
2. assess the extent of nutrition-related activities undertaken by teachers and parents; and
3. propose interventions to improve learners' nutritional status.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a **quantitative descriptive research design** to assess the nutritional status of intermediate learners and describe the nutrition-related activities implemented by teachers and parents.

The study was conducted at **San Francisco Elementary School, Concepcion West District, Tarlac Province**, during the School Year 2023–2024. The study involved **269 intermediate learners**, while teachers and parents served as respondents in evaluating nutrition-related practices.

A researcher-developed questionnaire was used. The first part gathered data on learners' nutritional status using Body Mass Index (BMI), while the second part measured nutrition-related activities undertaken by teachers and parents.

Data were analyzed using:

- Frequency and Percentage to determine learners' nutritional status;
- Weighted Mean to determine the extent of nutrition-related activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nutritional Status of Learners

Among the 269 learners, the majority (73.98%) had normal nutritional status. However, 10.41% were overweight, 10.04% were wasted, 3.34% were severely wasted, and 2.23% were obese.

Nutritional Status	Frequency	Percentage
Severely Wasted	9	3.34%
Wasted	27	10.04%
Normal	199	73.98%
Overweight	28	10.41%
Obese	6	2.23%

Although most learners exhibited normal BMI, the presence of both undernutrition and overnutrition indicates the need for continuous monitoring and targeted nutrition interventions. These findings are consistent with global reports emphasizing that malnutrition includes both nutrient deficiency and excess body weight.

Nutrition-Related Activities Undertaken by Teachers

Teachers implemented nutrition-related activities to a **moderate extent** (Overall WM = **2.54**). The highest-rated activity was providing supplementary feeding (WM = 3.25), followed by regular weighing of learners (WM = 3.12). Lower ratings were obtained in educating parents on food selection (WM = 1.25) and organizing cleanliness and food production activities (WM = 2.38).

These findings suggest that while teachers support nutrition initiatives, financial constraints, workload, and limited resources hinder the full implementation of school nutrition programs.

Nutrition-Related Activities Undertaken by Parents

Parents also demonstrated a **moderate extent** of nutrition-related practices (Overall WM = **2.59**). Improving children's eating habits (WM = 3.25) and providing regular meals (WM = 3.12) received the highest ratings,

whereas providing vitamins (WM = 1.72) and regular deworming (WM = 2.25) received relatively lower ratings.

The findings indicate that poverty, limited nutritional knowledge, and financial limitations affect parents' ability to consistently provide nutritious meals and preventive health practices.

Overall, the results demonstrate that improving learners' nutritional status requires stronger collaboration among schools, parents, local government units, and health agencies.

CONCLUSION

Most intermediate learners in San Francisco Elementary School exhibited normal nutritional status. Nevertheless, the presence of wasted, severely wasted, overweight, and obese learners indicates persistent nutritional concerns that warrant continuous intervention. Teachers and parents implemented nutrition-related activities only to a moderate extent, suggesting opportunities to strengthen school-based nutrition education, feeding programs, parental involvement, and health promotion initiatives. Sustained collaboration among schools, families, and community stakeholders is essential for improving learners' nutritional status and supporting their academic success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement the proposed nutrition intervention program through active collaboration among schools, parents, LGUs, and health agencies.
2. Strengthen school-based feeding, nutrition education, and BMI monitoring programs.
3. Increase parent education on healthy meal planning, food preparation, and child nutrition.
4. Integrate nutrition concepts into classroom instruction and school activities.
5. Conduct similar studies involving larger populations and multiple schools to validate and expand the findings.