

Perceived Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Nutritional Needs Of Primary School Age Children (6-10 Years) in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State.

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Abstract

The study examined the perceived socio-economic factors influencing nutritional needs of school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State. Descriptive research method was employed. The population for this study consists all primary schools in Ilesa East LGA. A total number of five hundred (500) respondents were used as sample though random sampling technique; self-developed close ended likert type of questionnaire was used to collect the data; the descriptive statistics of frequency percentage as well as chi (x^2) inferential

statistics were used to test the three hypotheses formulated at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The study concluded that poverty, family background and cultural practice were perceived as the factors influencing nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State. It was therefore recommended that parents should have detail knowledge of food and nutrition in order to meet up with the dietary requirement of their children. More also, communal belief that early consumption of food that are very rich in nutrient such as beef, chicken, eggs, salad prompt stealing in children should be discarded and parents should endeavour to feed their children with balanced diet in order to prevent all sorts of nutritional problems.

Keywords: Socio-Economic, Nutritional Needs, School Age Children, Influencing

Introduction

Over 12 million of children under the age 12 years die each year in developing countries as a result of poor nutrition while some are chronically under nourished, too hungry to live a productive and active life (Brenlander, 2021) The science of nutrition is concerned with the various useful ingredients or nutrients of which foods are composed (Adeogun, 2022). It is concerned with the sum of those processes whereby the body takes and use food for growth, development and maintenance of health.

According to Akinbile and Ajayi (2020) nutrition is defined as the science of food as it relates to the nourishment of the body for optimal health, it involves the science of food, the nutrients and the substances there in, their actions, interaction and balance in relation to health and disease and the process by which the organism ingests, digests, absorbs, transports, utilizes and excrete food substance. As human grows through early years into childhood, the need for energy and nutrients change, children need more energy, proteins, vitamins and minerals per pound of body weight than adult to support their tremendous growth and development. The nutrients required by the primary school age children can be assigned to three functional categories;

- Those that primarily supply energy (typically expressed in kilocalories (kcal)).
- Those meant for growth, development and maintenance.
- Those nutrients that are to keep body functioning and regulate the process (Fagbeja 2023).

Adeogun (2021) asserted that along with hereditary, nutrition determine the height, weight, physique of a school age child and affect his or her ability to resist diseases (immune system), he opined that there are several tell signs when a school age child is well nourished for example he or she looks normal, has good skin, strong and dark hair, good posture, well

developed body, alert expression, pleasant disposition, sound sleep, healthy appetite and stable personality.

The knowledge of nutrition and health are linked together because a proper knowledge of a child's nutritional need would go along way in deciding what to eat, where to eat, how to eat as food is needed for normal growth and proper functioning of the body system (Abiola, 2023). Since poor nutrition among school age children is associated with the bad condition such as dull hair, blemish skin, rings and circle around the eyes (sunken eyes), poor posture, dull expression, unpleasant disposition, insomnia, chronic fatigues and poor appetite (Burning, 2020). Sound nutritive food should be given to children as this will boost the immune system and prevent other future chronic health problems, mental deficiencies and retardation in cognitive development in later life (Laura, 2021).

The World Health Organization (2020) confirmed that Poverty is one of the most critical factors that predispose poor nutrition among primary school-aged children. Financial constraints restrict people living below the poverty line from accessing various and nutrient rich foodstuff, which leaves them with diets filled with cheap staples that are low in protein, vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients. This nutritional insufficiency is especially harmful in children of the age group 6-10, when the physical growth is active, cognitive processes are more active, and the metabolic rate is high. This lack of fulfilling these nutritional requirements will contribute to the likelihood of undernutrition, stunting, micronutrient deficiencies, and poor immune functionality, which directly affect the overall health and ability to attend school in the child. Fagbeja (2023) supported this by claiming that poverty is usually displaced with other structural issues like food insecurity, poor living conditions, and lack of health and nutrition services. Economically challenged families might have to care about survival necessities in the short term, at the expense of balanced diets, which leads to unbalanced eating patterns and even an inadequate intake of nutrients in young children. As a result, nutritional deprivation related to poverty may result in poor performance, exhaustion, and lack of concentration, which can eventually have an impact on the learning of children and their overall well-being.

According to Ajayi (2022), the Cultural beliefs have a strong impact on the range of dietary habits and food preferences among families, which contribute to the nutritional condition of primary school-aged children. In many communities, deeply rooted norms determine which foods are considered appropriate or "safe" for children, sometimes restricting access to essential nutrients. For example, cultural taboos may discourage the consumption of

eggs, meat, or chicken due to tradition belief that feeding the young children with such highly nutritious foods prompts stealing in later life. More also, Olaitan (2019) said that cultural feeding practices can dictate how meals are prepared, who receives the largest portions, and how children participate in communal eating habit, In a situation where men and older family members are prioritized during meals sharing, leaving younger children with less nutritious food options couple with denial of consuming certain fruits due to misconceptions and this has negative effect on growth, maturity and immune systems especially during a period when school age children bodies and brains require balanced nutrients for optimal development. In addition, Okunneye (2020) explained that Cultural norms may also influence maternal roles in feeding, weaning practices, and attitudes toward processed or fortified foods, harmful or restrictive norms may contribute to malnutrition, undernutrition, or unbalanced diets. These cultural factors need to be understood to help in coming up with nutrition interventions that should not discount the cultural practices of the communities but should also be able to help in ensuring the best health of the primary school-age children.

According to UNICEF (2023), the family's financial status is critical in determining the type, quality, and quantity of food that will be provided to primary school-age children. Families that have steady and sufficient income have a higher potential of offering balanced diets that encompass proteins, fruits, vegetables, and other nutrient-rich foods that are required to stimulate the growth and cognitive development of children. More economically stable families can also afford medical services, vitamin supplements, and fortified foods that can also supplement the nutrition of children. On the other hand, low-income families also have limited time and opportunities that compel them to resort to more energy-rich and yet nutrient-dense foods, which leads to under-nutrition or, paradoxically enough, overweight and obesity. In addition to access to food, financial status can also impact more general circumstances conducive to nutrition, including housing standards, hygiene, and access to clean water. Poor families might be subjected to living conditions that expose them to high infections that might further weaken the nutrient absorption and health status of the children. Olack (2021) emphasized that the Financial instability can also cause stress and lessen the caregiving ability of the parent, which will influence the meal planning, regular feeding schedules, and nutritional education at home. Consequently, the food decisions of the family are not merely a product of financial status but also a general socio-economic aspect that greatly influences the nutritional performance of children in their primary education years.

At the age of primary school, which is normally between the ages of 6 and 10, is one of the stages of development where physical growth and cognitive development grow remarkably. In these years, children need proper energy and nutrients to promote more active work, the formation of bones and muscles, maturation of body systems. Protein, calcium, iron, vitamins A and D, as well as essential fatty acids, are essential nutrients especially in supporting neural development, immunity, and healthy growth patterns. Nutrition contributes to maintaining concentration and memory, and overall academic performance, so dietary adequacy is also necessary not only to be physically healthy but also to succeed in education.

The age group is also becoming less dependent on food selections as they spend more time at school and in other social surroundings. Dietary habits may be corrupted by exposure to school feeding programs at breakfast, and the presence of snacks or fast food at times, culminating in unhealthy eating habits. Hence, the primary school level is a critical period for inculcating healthy eating habits that can be continued into adolescence and adulthood. The parents/caregivers should see to it that the children at the age of 6-10 years are exposed to quality meals, favorable home-based settings, and school policies favorable to nutrition, which is critical in ensuring long-term well-being and avoidance of health complications related to diets.

The relationship between socio-economic conditions and nutritional needs of school age children have been of interest and concern for centuries, recent studies such as a survey carried out by World Health Organization on Child nutritio and socio-economic influences and that of UNICEF on maternal and child nutrition framework have sought out the socio-economic factors that are relevant to the nutrition and health. Among the identified socio-economic factors influencing the nutritional needs of primary school age children are level of income, family background, education, cultural practice and civil status (Okunaye, 2022).

Purposes of Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the perceived socio-economic factors influencing the nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State.

1. To determine whether Poverty is perceived as a factor influencing the nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State.
2. To examine the extent to which Cultural beliefs are perceived as factors influencing the nutritional needs of school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State.

3. To assess whether Family financial status is perceived as a factor influencing the nutritional needs of school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State.

Hypothesis

1. Poverty will not significantly be perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State.
2. Cultural belief will not significantly be perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State.
3. Family financial status will not significantly be perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was utilized for the study. This design was adopted for being most-suitable for gathering data from a relative large no cases at a particular time as in the case of this study (Onifade, 2021).

The population of the study comprised the parents and caregivers of the children in primary schools within the study area, Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State,

For the purpose of this study, purposive and random sampling techniques were employed to select an appropriate 500 respondents (parents of primary school pupils) as sample size for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select ten streets close to primary schools within the study area while random sampling technique was used to select 50 respondents from each street making 500 respondents all together.

The instrument for the study was a researcher designed structured questionnaire validated by experts in the department of Health promotion and environmental Health Education, faculty of Education, University of Ilorin. The questionnaire which was developed inform of a close-ended of four-point Likert rating scale of strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree was adopted for scoring the respondents' responses. A test-retest technique was used to establish the reliability of the instrument through Pearson Moment Correlation Co-efficient (PPMCC). A Correlation Co-efficient of 0.76 was obtained. The instrument was self administered and the illiterate respondents were assisted to fill the questionnaire based on their responses.

The descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage as well as chi-square (X^2) inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Hypothesis 1: Poverty will not significantly be perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State,

TABLE 1: Chi-Square Analysis, Percentage and Frequency of Responses on Hypothesis 1.

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %	DF	X2 CRITICAL VALUE	X2 CALCULATED VALUE	LS	REMARKS
Strongly Agreed (SA)	190	19%					
Agreed (A)	210	21%	3	7.82	51.63	0.05	Significant
Disagreed (D)	65	6.5%					
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	35	3.5%					
Total	500	50%					

$$X^2 = 51.63, df 3, P > 0.05$$

The result of chi-square (X^2) analysis shows that the calculated chi-square (X^2) value of 51.63 was greater than the critical table value of 7.82 with degree of freedom of 3 at 0.05 alpha level of significance. Therefore the hypothesis that states that poverty will not significantly be perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State is hereby rejected. This implies that poverty was perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State.

HYPOTHESIS 2: Cultural belief will not significantly be perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State.

TABLE 2: CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS, PERCENTAGE AND FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES ON HYPOTHESIS 2

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %	DF	X2 CRITICAL VALUE	X2 CALCULATED VALUE	LS	REMARKS
Strongly Agreed (SA)	35	3.5%					
Agreed (A)	120	12%					
Disagreed (D)	185	18.5%	3	7.82	137.74	0.05	Significant
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	160	16%					
Total	500	50%					

$$X^2 = 137.74, df 3, P > 0.05$$

The result of chi-square (X^2) analysis reveals that the calculated chi-square (x^2) value of 137.74 was greater than the critical table value of 7.82 with degree of freedom of 3 at 0.05 alpha level of significance. Therefore the hypothesis that states that cultural belief will not significantly be perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa East local Government Area of Osun State is hereby rejected. This indicates that cultural belief would significantly be perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State.

HYPOTHESIS 3: Family financial Status will not significantly be perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of primary school children in Ilesa East Local Government Area.

TABLE 3: CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS, PERCENTAGE AND FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES ON HYPOTHESIS 3.

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %	DF	X2 CRITICAL VALUE	X2 CALCULATED VALUE	LS	REMARKS
Strongly Agreed (SA)	185	18.5%					
Agreed (A)	225	22.5%					
Disagreed (D)	90	9%	3	7.82	111.6	0.05	Significant
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	-	-					
Total	500	50%					

$$X^2 = 111.6, df 3, P > 0.05$$

The result of chi-square (x^2) analysis shows that the calculated chi-square (x^2) value of 111.6 was greater than the critical table value of 7.82 with degree of freedom of 3 at 0.05 alpha level of significance. Therefore the hypothesis that states that family status was perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa Local Government Area of Osun State is hereby rejected. This implies that family financial status was perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa Local Government Area of Osun State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from hypothesis one revealed that poverty was significantly perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State. The findings on this hypothesis supports the study of Adeogun (2020) who stated that poor nutrition is associated with poverty and the signs of poor nutrition include dull air, blemish skin, ring and circles around the eyes (sunken eyes) poor posture, obesity, dull expression, unpleasant disposition, insomnia, chronic fatigue and poor appetite.

The findings from hypothesis two revealed that cultural belief was significantly perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State. The findings on this hypothesis supports the study of Hodge (2021) who reported that there is tendency not to give children nutritious food such as meat, fish, egg, chicken because of the belief that a taste for rich nutritious food prompts children to steal in later life.

The findings from hypothesis three revealed that family financial status was perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa East Local Government Area of Osun State. The findings of this hypothesis supports the study of Gillman (2021) who reported that degree of parent socialization, level of education, civil status of the family and occupation determine the nutritional needs of the members of the family.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were reached;

1. That poverty was perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa Local Government Area of Osun State.
2. That cultural belief was perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa Local Government Area of Osun State.

3. That family financial status was perceived as a factor influencing nutritional needs of primary school age children in Ilesa Local Government Area of Osun State.

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were made;

1. Government at all level (local, state and federal) should provide free food support for school age children particularly through school feeding programs designed to improve the nutritional status of primary school pupils.
2. Parents should be empowered by Government through employment opportunity as this will reduce level of poverty and boost family income to supply adequate food to feed their children.
3. School Administrators should have a good food plan for the children and make sure that the children are feeding with the foods that are very rich in balanced diet especially during break hours.
4. Food and Nutrition should be incorporated into primary school curriculum as this will enlighten the pupils to sensitize their parent on the right type of food to be taken.
5. More also, communal belief that early consumption of food that are very rich in nutrient such as beef, chicken, eggs, salad prompt stealing in children should be discarded and parents should endeavour to feed their children with balanced diet in order to prevent all sorts of nutritional problems.

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