



Background paper WG 2

Nutrition education in schools and in their environments

Context:

The different forms of unhealthy eating are not only due to an insufficient and unbalanced choice of food available or the lack of access to high-quality food – the decisive factors are primarily the knowledge and education about balanced and sustainable dietary habits. The essential factors for achieving a good nutritional status include the level of education and access to information as well as the level of income and aspects of availability.

Awareness about the selection and quality of foods and about eating habits is also not only established at home, but a significant influence also comes from school. Nutrition education is an important element in this respect and generally refers to the process of acquiring nutrition-related expertise regarding the individual, social, and macrosocial context of nutrition. Formal nutrition education is defined by school curricula in educational institutes and includes the target-oriented acquisition of knowledge and skills regarding a healthy diet within the scope of subject-related classes.

Schools as educational and childcare facilities thus provide important learning environments in which education can be imparted and fleshed out pedagogically. Nutrition education in schools is part of the general educational mandate of a *Land*. The concept involves teachers and learners alike. It is often unclear what the components of a healthy diet are, what role hygiene plays and what constitutes sustainable nutrition.

A comprehensive nutrition education in schools is often insufficiently defined, institutionalised or poorly implemented not only in many low- and middle-income countries, but also in higher-income countries. The potential of education for healthy and sustainable school nutrition are considered to be high worldwide.

Working group 2 will therefore put emphasis on the question which actions are necessary in order to (1) ensure that school children are provided with a pedagogically responsible framework for nutrition education through school curricula, and to (2) involve the reference system for sustainable school nutrition, in particular the care givers, teachers, parents, as well as agri-food producers, so that access to nutrition education is made possible and the knowledge acquired is put into practice.



Priority issues:

I. Implementing nutrition education in schools

Nutrition educational content is taught in subject-related classes or interdisciplinary learning, e.g. in fleshing out and implementing school catering. Activity-based lessons can primarily be supported with training and school kitchens, as well as school gardens, and can set in motion important stimuli for holistic thinking. School canteens or student companies are also suitable places of learning where nutrition education can result in an appropriate selection of foods and where learners can apply their knowledge.

Different aspects of nutrition education are incorporated in education plans and school curricula. The educational mandate is carried out by educational professionals who need to have the relevant nutritional expertise. In Germany, in primary schools, for instance, the topic of nutrition is taught within the scope of the “general studies” subject; in secondary schools food and nutrition is addressed in biology or natural science classes.

For nutrition education, nutrition topics must also be comprehensively documented and addressed in the didactic teaching materials in order to build up knowledge. The contents must be reviewed by qualified bodies. Yet, in general, a wide range of general teaching materials on nutrition is available in the individual countries, which are co-developed and made available by inter-school institutions (public facilities, associations, foundations, and others)¹. The food industry partly also provides material for nutrition education.

Often, however, the topic of nutrition is insufficiently addressed within the scope of teachers’ and educational professionals’ training. In the training materials for educators, nutrition topics are usually insufficiently covered and teachers often lack access to further training courses.

In contrast with other areas, it is particularly important in the field of nutrition education to take sufficient account of the context-specific individual, social, cultural, and societal characteristics and factors influencing dietary habits.

Exchanging international learning experiences with regard to nutrition education holds the prospect of generating valuable contributions and approaches to sustainable school nutrition.

¹ <https://www.bmel.de/DE/themen/ernaehrung/gesunde-ernaehrung/kita-und-schule/studie-ernaehrungsbildung.html>



II. Nutrition education in sustainable school food environments

Only if schools apply educational programmes also to their environment, e.g. by considering the selection of food or meal planning as an important learning opportunity for all those involved, will they fully comply with their obligation to offer the children a health-promoting environment². An active faculty, committed student representatives or parent committees engaged in school environments, for instance, which take into account and promote the topics of nutrition and sustainability, contribute to this learning environment. Many approaches for teaching nutritional content in the form of cross-cutting issues are known that address dietary habits.

A comprehensive nutrition education that is aligned with school children's needs also links the stakeholders of the school system with the school catering reference system. For instance, learners are involved in the preparation of school meals in their own school kitchens and canteens. This is done, for example, by having students participate in the selection of nutritious food from local and regional production or in the local production of healthy school snacks led by groups of students. Nutritional awareness should be build up within the entire reference system of sustainable and healthy school nutrition. (see WG 3)

Interdisciplinary nutrition education can also be defined within a reference framework for nutrition and consumer education. For instance, the European health-oriented reform of nutrition and consumer education in schools (REVIS) sets rules for this. Nine rules describe goals in terms of knowledge and skills and individual nutrition topics³ that can be addressed and are verifiable.

Guiding questions:

1. What should education programmes and school curricula look like and what nutritional expertise do educators and teachers in schools need to be equipped with in order to establish healthy and sustainable school nutrition? How can the effects of these education programmes and curricula be verified? Should a separate subject on "nutrition" be made compulsory in schools?
2. Which learning experiences about nutrition can be gained from the educational work for stakeholders from the school environment, e.g. parent committees, student/teacher councils or local authorities in order to build up nutritional expertise for healthy and sustainable school catering?

² <https://www.nqz.de/schule/ernaehrungsbildung/#:~:text=Ern%C3%A4hrungsbildung%20bezeich-net%20einen%20lebensbegleitenden%20Prozess,p%C3%A4dagogischen%20Kontext%20verantwortlich%20gestaltet%20wird>

³ http://www.evb-online.de/schule_referenzrahmen.php



3. Which media and materials to support nutrition education have proven effective in providing activity-based educational work? Which interactive *e-learning* concepts and IT-based communication formats for improving school children's diets are recommendable? Which digital formats are particularly suitable for nutrition education?

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