



Cultivating Healthy Habits: A Case Study on the Impact of a School Garden and Cooking Programme on Nutrition Knowledge and Vegetable Preferences in Windhoek Primary Schools

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Abstract

Childhood nutrition is a public health concern in Namibia, with low vegetable consumption reported. School-based interventions are a recognised strategy for improving dietary habits. This case study examined a practical, experiential learning programme in a Windhoek primary school. The purpose was to assess the effects of an integrated school garden and cooking programme on children's nutrition knowledge and vegetable preferences. The objectives were to evaluate changes in participants' knowledge of healthy eating and to explore shifts in their willingness to try and preference for various vegetables. This qualitative case study collected data through direct observation of gardening and cooking sessions, focus group discussions with a purposive sample of participating children, and semi-structured interviews with teachers and programme facilitators. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Analysis revealed two primary themes: enhanced engagement and changed perceptions. Children demonstrated increased knowledge about vegetable origins and preparation. A shift in vegetable preferences was observed, with most focus group participants reporting a new willingness to taste garden-grown produce. This included previously avoided leafy greens such as spinach and Swiss chard. The integrated programme appeared to positively influence participants' nutrition knowledge and attitudes towards vegetables. Experiential, hands-on learning fostered a more favourable environment for dietary change in this setting. Programme sustainability should be prioritised through teacher training and securing long-term resources. Incorporating a parental engagement component is recommended to reinforce learning at home. Further research using mixed methods is warranted to quantify behavioural changes. school garden, nutrition education, vegetable consumption, dietary habits, paediatric nutrition, Namibia, case study This case study provides practical insights for dietitians, public health practitioners, and educators on implementing and evaluating experiential nutrition education programmes in similar resource-limited settings.

Keywords: *School-based intervention, Nutrition education, Child health, Sub-Saharan Africa, Vegetable consumption, Health promotion, Case study*

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