

## The role of school curricula in developing nutritional health awareness among learners

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### Abstract:

The present study aims to reveal the role played by school curricula – including textbooks and instructional materials – in spreading awareness and health education, particularly nutritional awareness during the schooling stage among learners. This topic is fundamentally related to the extent of the individual's understanding of the concept of health awareness and their contribution to it. The study also seeks to highlight the necessity of linking this awareness to the nutritional aspect due to its effective role in the individual's psychological, mental, and physical health, across different developmental stages and the learner's gender.

**Keywords:** health awareness, school health awareness, healthy nutrition, nutritional health awareness, school curricula, health education.

### Introduction:

Health is considered one of the most important topics that concern societies and individuals, and the responsibility for maintaining it lies with them, as it requires a set of behaviors that reflect this concern based on their awareness of this responsibility, and the benefits it provides in shaping their personality and preserving their well-being.

Educational institutions are keen to maintain the health of individuals within them, especially learners, as they adopt a set of procedures and roles based on a specialized body known as “school health,” represented by the screening and follow-up unit, which is responsible for this role. This is achieved through early diagnosis via periodic examinations, with the aim of identifying the current health status of learners, raising awareness among their parents and teachers, and guiding them toward proper preventive methods, within health awareness and education programs.

In addition to school health services, the school provides other services through its role and function related to health awareness, particularly nutritional awareness, through a set of curricula to which learners are exposed, whose objectives are directly linked to spreading nutritional awareness among them and enabling them to adopt healthy dietary behaviors, through health education based on classroom and extracurricular activities that provide them with sound dietary habits and ensure balanced growth to the greatest extent possible.

## **1. Study Problem**

The school is considered one of the most important educational channels available to promote the health of individuals and communities through the various awareness programs it provides, which aim to enhance the health of community members and prevent various diseases, injuries, and potential health problems.

For these and other reasons, there has been a growing need to pay greater attention to developing health awareness among learners due to its significant benefit in reducing or limiting the risk of various widespread diseases. Interest in this topic has increased through a number of related studies and research, accompanied by greater efforts to spread health culture and deliver it to society through learners and their parents.

There has also been increasing interest in incorporating concepts of health awareness and health culture into the content of school curricula in general, and into the curricula of certain subjects in particular, such as science and scientific education, across different educational stages.

These subjects focus on a very important aspect related to nutrition and dietary behavior, by promoting nutritional health awareness that enables the learner to adopt sound dietary practices, which contribute to acquiring healthy habits that preserve their physical, psychological, mental, and social health. This is achieved by developing awareness of the importance of balanced and healthy nutrition, spreading nutritional health culture, and teaching nutritional education according to developmental needs and related changes.

This study seeks to shed light on the role of school curricula in spreading health awareness in general, and nutritional health awareness in particular.

## **2. Study Objectives:**

- Revealing the role of school curricula in health awareness.
- Identifying nutritional health awareness.
- Revealing the role of school curricula in learners' nutritional health awareness.

## **First: School Curricula**

### **1. Concept of Curriculum:**

The dictionary of education defines curriculum as a list of subject contents structured in a way that takes into account the logical structure of objective knowledge in education and learning processes.

The concept refers to the set of educational, social, cultural, sports, religious, environmental, and artistic experiences imposed by the educational institution as learning and teaching for students inside or outside it, with the aim of achieving comprehensive development by providing them with patterns of behavior or modifying other patterns toward the desired direction. It also refers to the activities to be practiced alongside learning experiences and knowledge, in pursuit of building an integrated personality.

The modern concept of curriculum refers to it as a learning plan, which enhances the value of the planning process and emphasizes the need for it.

The educational curriculum is considered a developmental process that includes all components and dimensions of the educational process (planning – implementation – evaluation), aiming to reinforce the policy and philosophy of society and its progress and well-being.

It is also defined as the basic unit of the curriculum, which is the set of educational activities organized to achieve a predefined goal or a specific set of educational tasks (Barnawi Boutara, 2021, p. 231).

The concept of the educational curriculum also refers to the skills, inclinations, values, ways of thinking, attitudes, and aspects of activity provided by the school, as well as the methods through which experiences, knowledge, and information are presented, and the various types and forms of educational activities.

### **2. Criteria for Building the Curriculum:**

The curriculum is built according to a set of criteria, including (Hathrouni, 2011, p. 28):

- **Relevance:** refers to the degree of alignment between the set objectives and external educational goals, as well as the alignment between knowledge content and activities on the one hand, and objectives on the other (internal consistency).
- **Coherence:** refers to the necessity of adopting a systemic approach in building the educational curriculum to ensure the interconnection between the different core components of the educational process.

- **Adaptability:** the necessity for the curriculum to align with the nature of learners, the surrounding environment, the development of knowledge and information, advances in scientific and educational research, and developments in educational thought.
- **Applicability:** by considering all factors that help achieve educational objectives.
- **Ease of access and communication:** among participants in the educational process to ensure effectiveness and coherence in implementation.

### 3. Principles of the Educational Curriculum:

The principles of the educational curriculum can be summarized as follows (Al-Hila, 2002, p. 21):

- The curriculum is not merely a set of subjects.
- It is based on assisting the learner (effective learning) by providing appropriate conditions and environments.
- Helping the learner achieve the intended educational objectives.
- Focusing on the real value of the information and skills acquired by the learner and the possibility of applying them in practical life.
- The curriculum must adapt to the present and the future and be characterized by flexibility.
- Taking into account the learner's interests, attitudes, needs, problems, abilities, and readiness.

### 4. Importance of School Curricula:

The importance of school curricula can be summarized as follows (Al-Shazli and Salama, 2017, p. 9):

- Curricula derive their importance from being a fundamental component of the educational process.
- They serve as a means for development and comparison between societies.
- They contribute to the development of the individual based on the philosophy and objectives of society.
- They help instill values of perseverance and discipline among learners from the perspective of society.

### 5. Objectives of the Curriculum:

The objectives of the curriculum are summarized as follows (Al-Salam, 2018, p. 17):

- Qualifying learners academically and cognitively.
- Developing the ability to apply acquired knowledge in various situations.
- Building and developing the learner's personality.

- Developing competencies among teachers and learners.
- Deepening the training process for both teachers and learners.
- Developing positive attitudes toward education and learning.
- Keeping pace with scientific and technological development.
- Adopting effective teaching methods and strategies.
- Developing various aspects of thinking in the learner.

## **6. Foundations of Curriculum Development:**

Foundations refer to the set of basic forces that influence the process of curriculum development and improvement, as well as its objectives, the selection and organization of its content, in addition to determining the type of appropriate teaching methods and strategies, as well as educational activities and effective evaluation methods. The curriculum is built according to the following foundations (Tammar and Ben Brika, p. 17):

- **Philosophical and religious foundation:** derived from the philosophy of society, its values, and beliefs.
- **Cognitive foundations:** based on a set of ideas and knowledge that contribute to achieving educational objectives.
- **Social and cultural foundations:** include the social forces influencing the process of curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation, and are reflected in the cultural heritage of society, its principles, and values.
- **Psychological foundations:** related to learners' characteristics, needs, and demands, and to the learning process and its influencing factors such as development and learning theories.

## **Second: Nutritional Health Awareness among Students**

### **A- Health Awareness:**

#### **1. Concept of Health Awareness:**

Health awareness refers to the understanding of health knowledge and facts, the objectives related to health behavior, and the individual's awareness of themselves and the surrounding health conditions, and the formation of a mental attitude toward the general health of society.

It is also defined as the prevention of incorrect behavioral practices and negative habits that may cause individuals many diseases. In its broader dimensions, it is considered a means that contributes to the continuity of the individual's effective social role, in accordance with the requirements of physical, mental, and psychological safety laws, and the enjoyment of good health (psychological, physical, mental).

Health awareness also refers to the process through which negative health attitudes can be modified and positive attitudes developed among members of society, through the acquisition of proper health knowledge and practices, with the aim of improving the overall health level of society (Ben Ghadfa, 2007).

Health awareness is also defined as the process of motivating and persuading individuals to learn correct health practices, or the process of translating known health facts and concepts into sound behavioral patterns that lead to improving health levels by adopting various educational methods (Khaldi and Saadi, 2020, p. 508).

Al-Halabi defines it as the familiarity of citizens with health information and facts, along with their sense of responsibility toward their own health and the health of others, and the change in their health practices as a result of understanding and conviction. Health awareness also refers to individuals translating the health information, knowledge, and experiences they obtain from various sources into behavioral patterns that form, in general, a healthy lifestyle.

The World Health Organization defines it as the ability of the individual, their family, and their local community to access, understand, and benefit from health information in ways that promote and maintain good health (Al-Salmi and Hussein, 2021, p. 8).

## **2. Objectives of Health Awareness:**

The main objectives of health awareness are as follows (Mahjoub, 2008, p. 125):

- ❖ Providing assistance to individuals in understanding health facts and information, and identifying health problems and infectious diseases and ways to prevent them.
- ❖ Providing data and information that contribute to maintaining public health by following the instructions issued by specialized bodies.
- ❖ Encouraging community members to participate in finding solutions to problems that contribute to reducing the causes of disease and providing a safe environment.
- ❖ Encouraging individuals to acquire health information.
- ❖ Guiding individuals to change unhealthy concepts.
- ❖ Directing individuals to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

## **3. Fields of Health Awareness:**

The fields of health awareness include the following aspects:

- **Personal health:** includes a healthy home environment, personal hygiene, and proper nutrition.
- **Nutrition:** concerns the study of the relationship between food and the body, including food intake, growth processes, reproduction, tissue maintenance, and waste elimination.

- **Safety and first aid:** to avoid risks and sudden accidents.
- **Environmental health:** by instilling environmental concepts related to preserving the environment and ensuring its suitability for living.
- **Diseases and their prevention:** includes identifying infectious and non-infectious diseases and the factors contributing to their spread (biological, nutritional, natural, psychological, chemical causes).
- **Consumer health:** through awareness of advertisements related to food and health insurance and correcting misinformation.
- **Sexual education:** aims to raise awareness about the anatomical and functional structure of the reproductive system, marriage, motherhood, fatherhood, pregnancy, and sexual health problems (Al-Tarjami et al., 2022, pp. 13–14).
- **Mental and psychological health:** through achieving balance between mental and psychological health, controlling internal and external emotions, and protecting individuals from psychological and mental disorders.
- **Tobacco, alcohol, and addiction:** through awareness of the dangers of drugs and stimulants (Hatem, 2006, p. 280).

### **1. Methods of Health Awareness:**

There are several methods and approaches to raise the level of health awareness among individuals, most notably (Leila, 2000, p. 173):

- ✓ Verbal reinforcement to instill a positive attitude toward healthy behavior.
- ✓ Debate, allowing learners to discuss different viewpoints and develop critical awareness.
- ✓ Acquiring up-to-date information related to health awareness.
- ✓ Simulation, role modeling, and exemplification to acquire positive health attitudes.
- ✓ Practice and participation in various activities related to public health and nutrition.

### **B- School Nutritional Health Awareness:**

Before addressing the concept of school nutritional health awareness, it should be noted that this element falls within school health awareness, which includes three main aspects:

#### **1. School Health:**

It is one of the specialized programs derived from public health programs, focusing on students. It is linked to health education and aims directly to provide learners with basic information that helps them prevent various diseases, maintain their health, and guide their inclinations toward healthy habits by instilling positive values.

## **2. Infection Control:**

School health awareness focuses on educating learners about the dangers of the spread of certain diseases, understanding the health risks resulting from them, and maintaining their health against them. Health awareness in this sense is a global objective and a noble social means that various organizations seek to promote. Health awareness programs also aim to disseminate various preventive measures that contribute to reducing the spread of diseases.

## **3. Proper Nutrition:**

It includes various natural sources (plant and animal) as well as industrial sources (such as drugs and nutritional supplements). Attention to this aspect is necessary because nutrition provides the body with components that support growth, balance, vitality, mental ability, and overall quality of life.

Proper nutrition also enables individuals to have strong immunity and a balanced diet, making them more resistant to diseases. It should be noted that proper nutrition is not only related to the type of food and dietary habits, but also to physical activity and exercise due to their role in reducing many health problems such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, obesity, and increased risk of cancer. Prevention of these diseases can only be achieved through preventive health awareness (Al-Salmi and Hussein, 2021, pp. 17–24).

### **Third: The Role of School Curricula in Developing Nutritional Health Awareness among Learners**

Health awareness refers to the process of motivating and convincing learners to adopt healthy life practices, or translating health facts and concepts into desirable behavioral patterns aimed at raising their health culture and awareness level. This is achieved by forming positive attitudes toward prevailing health issues and problems in society and engaging with them consciously.

This paper focuses on the effective role of school curricula in certain subjects and the associated classroom and extracurricular activities in spreading nutritional health awareness among learners. These curricula play an important role in changing learners' dietary behavior, especially considering the physiological changes that accompany different stages of growth and gender differences. Dietary behavior in males is often associated with muscle strength and body structure, while in females it is associated with slimness and attention to body shape and appearance.

School curricula, particularly those related to environmental topics and individual health—such as science—aim to instill principles of nutritional education, which are a set of habits and behaviors related to food, intended to modify dietary behavior and improve the health of the individual and society, as well as to educate individuals against diseases (Fakhr and Aisha, 2003, p. 24).

Today, the school, through its curricula, teachers, classroom and extracurricular activities, and textbooks, seeks to develop good habits and maintain the student's general health—psychological and physical—in a balanced and integrated manner, through a set of fundamental roles (Jaber and Al-Qars, 2016, pp. 117–118):

- Providing learners with individual health knowledge about various diseases.
- Providing them with essential health rules for preventing risks and diseases.
- Instilling sound health attitudes.
- Contributing to the formation of positive health habits.
- Providing necessary healthcare through school screening and follow-up units.

Accordingly, school curricula aim—through the knowledge and information they contain—to equip learners with healthy and sound nutritional behaviors, in addition to guiding their inclinations and attitudes toward adopting healthy lifestyles. With the accumulation of these experiences and information, acquired behaviors become firmly established convictions and habitual practices that enable learners to maintain their health and that of their families and society, and encourage them to follow preventive measures that protect them from physical, psychological, and mental harm.

### **Conclusion:**

Nutritional health awareness is one of the fundamental pillars in building a healthy individual and an aware society, as balanced physical, mental, and psychological development can only be achieved through individuals' awareness of the importance of proper nutrition and healthy lifestyle practices. The paper has shown that this awareness is not acquired spontaneously, but is the result of interaction between the family, school, and media; however, the school remains the most influential and sustainable institution in consolidating this awareness through curricula that convey health knowledge, instill proper attitudes, and support positive behaviors among learners.

Studies show that integrating health concepts into curricula is not limited to the cognitive aspect, but extends to influencing attitudes and values, and contributes to modifying unhealthy behaviors, making health education one of the fundamental educational approaches to achieving sustainable human development. Hence, the necessity of updating educational curricula to respond to contemporary health and nutritional challenges faced by learners in their daily lives is emphasized.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Integrating health and nutritional education as a fundamental axis in all educational stages, not limited to science, but extending to physical education, family education, languages, and civic education.
2. Providing specialized training for teachers in the field of health and nutritional awareness, enabling them to effectively transmit knowledge and proper practices.
3. Incorporating classroom and extracurricular activities that promote healthy nutritional behavior, such as competitions, health days, and field visits to health facilities.
4. Strengthening the partnership between school and family through joint health awareness programs to ensure consistency of healthy behavior at home and school.
5. Updating educational content in accordance with modern health standards and international recommendations (such as the World Health Organization and UNICEF).
6. Encouraging educational research on the relationship between health awareness and school curricula, and evaluating the impact of educational programs on learners' nutritional and health behavior.
7. Employing digital media and educational technology in spreading health culture through interactive and engaging methods aligned with the interests of the new generation.

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