



## Healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions and its role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children: a field study from the point of view of kindergarten teachers

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### Abstract

The study aimed to identify healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions and its role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children. The study population and sample consisted of (108) kindergarten teachers in the city of Najran in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who were selected from government kindergarten institutions in a random manner. The study was conducted During the first semester of the university year (2023/2024), the descriptive analytical approach was used in the study, and the researchers built a questionnaire directed at kindergarten teachers to find out the role of healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions in enhancing the health security of a child from the point of view of kindergarten teachers, and it included The questionnaire consisted of 18 paragraphs distributed over three main axes. The first axis included "The reality of healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions for kindergarten children," the second axis "Requirements of healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions and their role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children," and the third axis "Proposals for healthy nutrition in Early childhood institutions and their role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children. The results were processed and the study reached the following results: Providing healthy nutrition in kindergarten institutions is necessary and a basic requirement in an era in which children today suffer from indiscriminate nutrition and unhealthy food. The research sample agreed that providing healthy nutrition is important and necessary in early childhood institutions to enhance the health security of kindergarten children, and it came in large proportions. The study concluded with some proposals and visions regarding healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions and its role in enhancing the health security of kindergarten children.

Keywords: Healthy nutrition, early childhood, health security, Kindergarten teachers.

### Introduction

Healthy nutrition for children in early childhood is necessary and important, as it contributes to enhancing their physical growth, mental development, and strengthening their cognitive and perceptual functions. Accordingly, a good understanding of the

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components of healthy food helps the family, kindergarten teachers, and child caregivers make better choices when preparing food for children.

Healthy food for the child in early childhood is very important and necessary for the child's development and health security. Healthy food is balanced and varied food that contains all the basic nutritional elements that the body needs. Healthy food includes the six food groups, which include proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and main minerals. , water.

Scientific studies and research have proven that health and proper nutrition are not only responsible for the formation and building of the body, but they have an important role in directing the social, moral and intellectual behavior of the individual and are direct evidence of the quality of life and evidence of the extent of social and economic development, because of the importance of proper nutrition in natural growth and mental development. Optimum health for the sick, healthy, and maintaining good health throughout a person's life (Al-Dasduqi, 2001, 3).

Nutritional education contributes to avoiding many diseases and health problems, such as tooth decay, anemia resulting from iron deficiency, and heart disease. It also helps to avoid future obstructive problems and envy of the family's nutritional practices (Abdel-Khaleq, 2004).

The lack of health and nutritional awareness of mothers is considered one of the factors affecting the nutritional status of the child, as it is not enough for the mother to be able to provide food, but she must have knowledge of the basics of preparing meals and choosing the appropriate food for the child's daily needs and what suits the condition of his condition, as modifying habits The nutritional practices of the mothers' mothers reflect positively on the children's nutritional behaviors (Abdel Rahman,2009).

The child needs healthy nutrition and healthy, complete and varied food in order to grow normally and there is no single food that can be relied upon as complete nutrition for the individual. Therefore, it was necessary to diversify the daily food into a group of foodstuffs to ensure obtaining all the nutrients necessary for the body. In human nutrition, it has been termed to divide Foods are divided into groups, each of which contains multiple foods, but they are relatively similar in their nutritional content. Foods from one group can be used as substitutes for each other in a way that ensures the diversity of one food, and a minimum number of foods from each group is used so that the meal becomes balanced, diverse, and comprehensive of all nutrients (Al-Jundi (2012).

### **Healthy nutrition in early childhood**

Healthy nutrition is considered one of the important factors for an individual to meet his nutritional needs, and it affects growth and health. Therefore, attention to forming healthy habits will benefit the child and society as a whole, as childhood is considered one of the most important stages of life in which the habits and values that accompany the individual throughout his life are formed, and nutritional habits such as habits The other is the result of these actions, especially in the early childhood stage. The truth is that most nutritional problems are due to wrong behavioral patterns, which in turn lead to a lack of healthy eating habits. This requires directing more attention to healthy nutrition, which includes modifying eating practices, and one of the most important healthy eating habits that must be we must maintain the following: eating breakfast, diversity in food, maintaining a healthy diet, eating the right snacks, and not refraining from eating any food.

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Experts agree that good healthy nutrition is important for health. Jung (2013) points out the role of the kindergarten teacher in introducing children to everything about healthy eating in a fun way, by growing vegetables and going on exciting trips to explore and learn through the senses with the help of nutrition experts. He says let your child learn the subjects. Nutrition with all senses using his works or templates for handicrafts and games, including creating an exhibition of healthy food foods (Jung, 2013). Healthy nutrition is what provides the body with sufficient calories and the nutrients necessary for the functions of the organs and the health of the body. A balanced diet is obtaining all the nutrients. Important for the body in specific proportions and it is rare for there to be a single food that contains all the nutritional elements (Abdel Salam, 2012, p. 10). Walter, 2011 also explains the importance of taking the teacher into consideration to encourage children to use the senses in all forms of learning and to develop the four senses of sight and Smell, hearing, and tasting, along with the use of exciting activities and experiences to encourage the child to eat healthy and sound (Walter, 2011). Wagner, 2012, also explained the necessity of training children in kindergarten to prepare meals with the help of the teacher that contain salad, alcohol, fruits, and juices, and she observes and guides them step by step. While strengthening their ideas by asking questions: What can we do with leftover food (Wagner, 2012). The report issued by UNICEF in 2008 indicates that the devastating effects of malnutrition are transmitted from one generation to the next, just as the benefits of good nutrition are transmitted across generations. Providing starting a child with nutrition has a lifelong impact on his physical, mental and social development. Malnutrition weakens the body's immune system, which makes the child vulnerable to diseases, increases the severity of his illness and hinders his recovery and recovery. The sick child, in turn, quickly becomes malnourished, and complementary foods can Nutrition that is appropriate for the child's age, in addition to providing him with appropriate health care, can break this vicious circle.

The study problem:

Specialized studies in early childhood education indicate the importance of healthy nutrition for the kindergarten child and its role in achieving the child's health security, as it provides an environment that supports the child's health security. Studies confirm the importance of healthy food for the child, as the first years of a child's life are considered one of the most important and influential stages of life. On a person's future, the first years are a formative stage in which the foundations of his personality are laid and he acquires his various habits and behavior patterns. He is exposed to experiences, relationships, and interactions that have an impact on his future directions. Hence the importance of healthy nutrition for the child and its role in achieving health security for the child.

Therefore, the study problem can be formulated in the following question Therefore; the study problem can be formulated in the following question

#### **: Study questions**

- 1- What is the reality of healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions to achieve health security for kindergarten children?
- 2- What are the requirements for healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions and its role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children?
- 3- What are the proposals for healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions and its role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children?

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### **Objectives of the study**

- Identifying the reality of healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions to achieve health security for kindergarten children.
- Identify the requirements for healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions and their role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children.
- Coming up with proposals for healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions and its role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children?

### **The importance of studying**

The importance of the study comes from the fact that healthy nutrition is necessary and important to achieve health security for kindergarten children, in addition to presenting educational proposals in the health field. Security in kindergartens, and an attempt to establish the concepts of health security in the kindergarten child so that he can distinguish between positive and negative health behaviors, and make the right choice between them, and an attempt to intensify efforts that allow kindergartens to participate with the family to develop health awareness and its great impact on raising the kindergarten child, as many can Those interested in early childhood can benefit from the results of this study in planning to activate kindergarten programs in the health fields and organize them administratively, so that the kindergarten child achieves health security.

### **Study Justifications:**

- Describe the practical practices of the importance of healthy nutrition for kindergarten children in kindergarten institutions.
- Identifying the role of healthy nutrition in achieving health security for kindergarten children, as well as educating children with the aim of identifying and strengthening areas of strength and fields. Weakness and its treatment, as the success of learning and teaching health security concepts to the kindergarten child depends on the ability and skill of the kindergarten teacher and the extent of the attention that the child receives in terms of guidance and education at this early age.

The limits of the study

The limitations of the study are as follows

Objective: Know the role of healthy nutrition in achieving health security for kindergarten children in kindergarten institutions

Spatial boundaries: Najran city, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Time limits: First semester 2023-2024

Human Frontiers: Kindergarten teachers in Najran

### **Terminology of study:**

Role:

Terminologically: The concept of role refers to a pattern of expected action. It is originally a term borrowed by many sciences through theatre, and it means the mask that an actor wears to perform a role. It is also defined as a pattern of behavior expected of an individual in a specific situation that is determined by the activity he must perform in light of... The prevailing culture in the social entity (Barian, 1425, p. 37) and it is also known as a set of usual methods for doing certain things and accomplishing specific functions in a given social situation (Al-Sharif, 2007, p. 10).

**Diversity in food:**

The child needs healthy, complete and varied food in order for him to grow normally, and there is no single food that can be relied upon as a complete food for humans. Therefore, it was necessary to diversify the daily food into a group of foodstuffs to ensure obtaining all the nutrients necessary for the body. In human nutrition, it is common to divide foods into Groups, each of which contains multiple foods, but they are relatively similar in their nutritional content. Foods from one group can be used as substitutes for each other in a way that ensures the diversity of the same foods. A minimum number of foods from each group is used so that the meal becomes balanced, diverse, and comprehensive of all nutrients.

**Health:**

Some may consider it a person's freedom from diseases and his enjoyment of good health, while others see it as a person's compatibility with the surrounding environment, or as a state of integration between the individual's physical and psychological functions, but everyone agrees on its necessity for the individual. In addition, society (Abu Shukair, 2006, p. 23), and the definition of health as stated in the World Health Organization: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organization 2016).

**Previous studies**

- A study (Brandt, 2016) emphasized the importance of training children in hygiene tasks in kindergartens. The study aimed to raise children's awareness of diseases that may arise through the child's use of the toilet. The study concluded that it is necessary to train children to use the toilet in a flexible atmosphere so that there is Effective participation between the family and kindergartens. The study recommended the need for adults to provide the necessary support to children to develop their knowledge and skills in this health aspect, so that there are effective programs designed to accelerate the success of children learning good health habits.

- As explained by the study (Textor, Martin R 2012), which aimed to know the importance of daily bread and foodstuffs in the life of the German family by identifying consumption and the amount of food waste. The study showed the importance of food and its value in the health of the family, and made it clear that Germany was dependent on nature. And farmers to provide daily bread by eating healthy food, vegetables and fruits, as well as home-raised meat, but now the family is looking to buy ready-made foods, and these foods lack the taste of nature and health, as they contain a lot of fats, sugars, and dyes with attractive colors, according to a study published in 2012 from Before consumer protection, German families disposed of 6.7 million tons of food waste with an estimated value of 21.6 billion euros, equivalent to 235 euros per person. The study concluded that it is necessary to plan for shopping, obtain the appropriate quantities for the family, and pay attention to healthy meals for the family. The study recommended the need to enjoy Children are encouraged to eat healthy food through tasting the senses, taking field trips to plants and trees, watching the rain, observing the development of plants and birds, and letting the children prepare foods themselves under the supervision of adults. Through this, children can acquire a healthy culture of eating and consuming food and not wasting it.

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### **Study population and sample:**

The study population consisted of kindergarten teachers in kindergarten institutions in the city of Najran. The study was implemented during the first semester of the academic year 2023/2024, and consisted of a random sample of kindergarten teachers, numbering (108) teachers.

### **Study Approach:**

The study followed the descriptive and analytical approach, which is the approach that is concerned with collecting accurate scientific descriptions of the studied phenomenon, describing the current reality and its interpretations, as well as identifying common practices and determining opinions, beliefs, and trends among individuals and societies groups. Moreover, methods of its growth and development. It also aims to study the relationships existing between different phenomena (Abdel Hafeez, 2000). , s. 84). This is done through evaluating kindergarten teachers for healthy nutrition in kindergarten institutions to achieve health security for kindergarten children.

### **Study tools:**

The researchers developed the study tools (questionnaire) after reviewing the information related to them and related studies, and based on the information available to the researchers. They prepared the questionnaire in its final form. The number of paragraphs was (18), and their suitability was taken into account when constructing the questionnaire. Since the study is descriptive, the researcher tried to diversify the statistical treatment method, as the researcher used the SPSS program to convert non-parametric values (yes - no) into parametric values that can be compared. He calculated the average, standard deviation, and degree of practice. The average of 1 to 1.66 is weak in practice. As for the average from 1.67 to 2.32, its practice is actually considered average, while the average from 2.33 to 3 is considered great practice. To answer the study questions, the arithmetic means and standard deviations for each item of the scale and percentages were extracted.

### **Stability of study tools:**

Table No. (1) shows the importance of the reliability of the study tool (kindergarten teachers' questionnaire) in evaluating the healthy nutrition of kindergarten children to achieve health security, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. Data derived from the total sample were used, and the following are data for reliability coefficients:

Questionnaire axes	Number of items	Number of participants	Reliability coefficient
		Kindergarten teachers	Kindergarten teachers
The reality of healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions for kindergarten children	6	108	0.745
Requirements of healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions and their role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children	6	108	0.944
Proposals for healthy nutrition in Early childhood institutions	6	108	0.867

and their role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children			
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Table one before shows that values of Alpha- Cronbach indicate a high degree of internal consistency, which, in turn proves that the scale contains high degrees of reliability significance.

### Statistical processing

Since the current study is descriptive and analytical, the researchers tried to vary the methods of statistical treatments. The SPSS program was used to change the non-parametric values (yes - no) to parametric values that can be compared. Then they calculated the average range and the degree of practice. For example, the practice was described A practice whose average ranges from 1.00 to 1.66 is classified as weak, a practice whose average ranges from 1.67 to 2.32 is classified as moderate, while a practice whose average ranges from 2.33 to 3.00 is classified as very strong. Finally, to answer the study questions, scores, percentages, and standard deviations were calculated for all items of the study scale separately. Results of the study.

Table 2: means and standard deviations of the reality of healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions for kindergarten children

The reality of healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions for kindergarten children	Responses of kindergarten teachers teacher (N.=108)		
	Mean	Std.	Rank Practice degree
1. The child is introduced to the components of a healthy diet.	2.48	0.882	High
2. The child is directed to eat clean food so that he does not contract diseases	2.56	0.928	High
3. The child is encouraged to eat mainly dairy products.	2.76	0.929	High
4. Make sure that the child eats fruits and vegetables at every meal.	2.65	0.929	High
5. The child is instructed to wash vegetables and fruits well.	2.66	0.882	High
6. The child is introduced to healthy, integrated food and is guided positively to eat it	2.80	0.928	High

It is clear from Table No. (2) that the arithmetic averages of the responses of the sample members of kindergarten teachers to the items in this field range between (2.39-2.80), which is a large arithmetic average, and this indicates the knowledge and skills that kindergarten institutions in Saudi Arabia attach to the kindergarten child regarding It is related to healthy, healthy nutrition. Then, many of the answers to the questionnaire items came with a high degree of verification, which means that kindergartens provide children

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at an early age with the knowledge and concepts to care about healthy, healthy nutrition, which contributes to enhancing the child's health security.

Table 3: means and standard deviations Requirements of healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions and their role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children.

Requirements of healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions and their role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children	Responses of kindergarten teacher's teacher (N.=108)		
	Mean	Std.	Practice degree
1. It is necessary to choose natural foods that are suitable for the child in early childhood	2.67	0.943	High
2. Direct children to eat more fruits and vegetables	2.86	0.865	High
3. Instruct children to avoid foods that rely on artificial ingredients	2.78	0.915	High
4. Urging children to eat whole grains during healthy eating.	2.64	0.935	High
5. Urge children to drink plenty of water.	2.41	0.943	High
6. Working to nourish children's nutritional culture with appropriate and healthy food	2.45	0.854	High

By reading, the results of the table above, we find that the weighted arithmetic averages of the responses of the sample of kindergarten teachers who responded to the items in this field are high. The average ranged between items (2.41-2.86), which is a large arithmetic average. This indicates that healthy nutrition requirements in kindergarten institutions are required and necessary to take care of the child's health, so that he eats healthy and sound food. Which undoubtedly contributes to developing and maintaining the health security of the kindergarten child.

In light of calculating the arithmetic mean and standard deviation, it was found that there were no statistically significant differences at the significance level ( $\geq \alpha 0.05$ ) between the responses of the study sample members to the statements in this field. This explains the grades obtained by the statements in this field and the impact of healthy nutrition in kindergarten institutions on achieving health security for children.

**Table 4: means and standard deviations of the** Proposals for healthy nutrition in early childhood institutions and their role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children

Proposals for healthy nutrition in Early childhood institutions and their role in enhancing health security for kindergarten children	Responses of kindergarten teachers teacher (N.=108)		
	Mean	Std.	Rank Practice degree
1. It is necessary for the child in kindergarten to eat a variety of foods, including fruits and vegetables.	2.45	0.954	High
2. It is necessary for the child in kindergarten to drink fluids in sufficient quantities of water	2.73	0.929	High

3. It is necessary for the child to eat low-fat dairy products, such as milk, yoghurt, and various cheeses.	2.62	0.987	High
4. The child should eat baked goods made from whole grains	2.46	0.924	High
5. It is necessary to eat chopped vegetables, such as: celery, carrots, and cucumber	2.44	0.885	High
6. The child must eat proteins, carbohydrates, fats, etc.	2.56	0.882	High

It is clear from the previous table that we find that the weighted arithmetic averages of the sample members' responses to the items in this field ranged between (2.44-2.73), which is a high arithmetic average. This indicates that the proposals mentioned by the kindergarten teachers for the role of sound healthy nutrition play a major role in feeding the child in a sound way. It is clear that sound nutrition for the kindergarten child contributes to achieving health security for the child, as healthy nutrition is considered necessary and very important for the child in the early stage and is a foundation for the development of health security for the child.

In light of calculating the arithmetic mean and standard deviation, it was found that there were no statistically significant differences at the level of significance ( $\geq \alpha 0.05$ ) between the responses of the study sample members to the statements in this field, which is proper healthy nutrition for kindergarten children.

### **Conclusions:**

In light of the results of the current study, the results contributed to the importance of healthy nutrition and the benefits of healthy food for children, maintaining healthy skin and teeth, and maintaining healthy eyes, which contributes greatly to achieving health security for kindergarten children. Among the results reached by the study:

- It is necessary for children to receive healthy nutrition in kindergarten institutions because it contributes to achieving health security for the child.
- The study showed the extent of kindergarten teachers' awareness of the importance of proper healthy nutrition, eating fruits, proteins and vegetables, and making sure to wash vegetables and fruits well before eating them to achieve health security for the child.
- The study confirmed the effective role of healthy nutrition for children from the point of view of teachers in promoting health awareness among kindergarten children because of its positive benefits for the child by taking into account his development and growth.
- The results of the study revealed the positive role of healthy nutrition for the child and the development of healthy eating habits, which is important because it enhances the child's health security.

### **Study recommendations:**

In light of the results of the study related to healthy nutrition for kindergarten children to achieve health security for kindergarten children, some recommendations and proposals can be made, including the following:

- Increasing the use of practical activities and direct experiences in developing the health security of kindergarten children.

- The Ministry of Education should involve community institutions that are related to children's health awareness by creating positive educational and recreational programs and activities that improve the quality of teaching and learning outcomes in early childhood.
- Raising the efficiency of teachers to activate the concepts of health security for kindergarten children by giving them training and educational courses in this aspect, called continuous professional development for the teacher.
- Utilizing the experiences of developed countries in supporting and encouraging the dissemination of healthy culture concepts in kindergartens, for example the German experience in supporting the family in the process of communication and cooperation with the kindergarten in order to educate the child about health culture, and trying to benefit from it in a way that suits the conditions,.
- Directing the results of this study to those in charge of managing kindergartens at the Ministry of Education, to determine the extent to which the quality of upbringing, education and care of the kindergarten child is improved by activating healthy nutrition for the kindergarten child at this critical stage.

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