

Chapter 3

Fostering Ownership and Sustainability of School-Based Nutrition Education Intervention: Challenges and Lesson Learned Through PAR Study in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Promoting healthy nutritional behaviors in schoolchildren is still challenging since students' nutritional behaviors are influenced by multilevel determinants. This chapter unpacks a range of contextualized approaches that were the hallmarks of fostering ownership and sustainability of school-based nutrition education intervention (SBNEI) to transform nutritional behaviors in basic-level schoolchildren in a public school in Nepal. The chapter discusses three approaches to fostering the ownership and sustainability of the intervention undergoing a participatory action research (PAR) framework. The first approach is developing the intervention following the five-step bottom-up model. The second approach is considering the multilevel and multicomponent SBNEI. And the third approach is owning transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration. This chapter offers insightful learning space to the related field's teachers, educators, and researchers to consider contextualized approaches undergoing a PAR framework for fostering the ownership and sustainability of the school-based interventions.

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INTRODUCTION

Schoolchildren spend most of their productive time at school. The health and well-being of schoolchildren must be a fundamental value of society since healthy behaviors developed at early ages persist across their lifespan (Kelder et al., 1994). Fostering healthy nutritional behaviors during early life through the school setting can promote optimal health, growth, and educational development and can contribute to preventing chronic disease in the later stages of life (Cohen et al., 2021; De Bourdeaudhuij et al., 2011; Van Cauwenberghe et al., 2010). Unhealthy behaviors among schoolchildren have underscored the need for participatory action research among the school community in taking a comprehensive approach to getting context-bound solutions to the problem (Upreti et al., 2023).

Schools are perceived as powerful settings that can influence young children's eating behavior (Centers for Disease Control Prevention (CDC), 2011; Langford et al., 2014) through nutrition education (Contento, 2008, 2011). Schools also provide an optimal supportive setting to promote healthy behaviors leading to healthy lifestyles (Harake et al., 2018; Townsend & Foster, 2011). Moreover, as eating is a socially learned behavior, a school-based nutrition education intervention (SBNEI) can provide an entry point to tap into the power of inter-personal and setting level influences among schoolchildren strengthening healthy nutritional behaviors (Antwi et al., 2020; Dorado et al., 2020; Hawkins et al., 2020; Jung et al., 2019; Upreti et al., 2022; Upreti et al., 2023; Yip et al., 2016). SBNEI is particularly important among students from low-income and ethnic minority communities, as they are at risk for poor health outcomes (Melnick et al., 2022; Seligman et al., 2010). Given the context, this chapter attempts to unpack the range of contextualized participatory approaches that were the hallmarks of the Rupantaran project to foster ownership and sustainability of SBNEI in a public school of Nepal located in Chitwan and to distil lessons learned that may be of use to other future studies and projects with similar aims.

Setting the Context of the Study

A school-based nutrition education intervention (SBNEI)—developed during the PhD project of the lead researcher—was undertaken with a research grant received from the Norad-supported NORHED portfolio Rupantaran¹ project (2016-2023) under the tripartite collaboration among three research partners: Tribhuvan University (TU), Kathmandu University (KU), and the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU). The native name of Rupantaran¹ refers to 'transformation' in English. The project aims to contribute new knowledge concerning innovative approaches to improve the quality of teaching and learning in resource-constrained schools in Nepal. This academic project aimed to catalyze improvements in the quality of teaching and learning at the basic level of school education through developing innovative, transformative, and contextualized pedagogical approaches and improving health and livelihood prospects in the resource constraints schools of Nepal. The PhD fellow researchers of TU engaged in 'health and livelihood prospects' studies in the selected public schools of Chitwan—central Terai of Nepal. Among the five focused areas of the study in Chitwan, namely Ecosan toilet, School gardening, School Nutrition, Skill-based health education, and School entrepreneurship in a selected public school of Chitwan, the lead researcher of this chapter collaborated with the school community—who are also the co-authors of this chapter to co-design and co-implement a SBNEI—a four-year-long (2018-2022) project. The second and third co-authors of this paper are the basic schoolteachers, and the fourth is the chairperson of the school management committee (SMC), who were involved in this study as the

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