

Research Brief

Development of Integrated Nutrition Messages for Schools

Research Questions

1. What are some of the messages on key thematic issues of healthy diets, nutrition, immunity, hygiene and sanitary practices, physical activity, and lifestyle and environment, that can be impactful?
2. How can the messages be improved and made more understandable, using trials of improved practices (TIPs) and other methods?
3. How can messages be grouped thematically for dissemination to the three categories of student groups?

Answers from the Research

Messages were generated by reviewing the existing textbooks/curricula of different grades of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), relevant nutrition policies, and evidence obtained from the assessment of knowledge of students and parents covered in the study. A set of impactful, culturally-appropriate, pictorial and narrative messages were developed on: having at least five food groups daily of the globally recommended ten food groups; functions of food groups; drinking adequate water; washing hands with soap before eating and after defecation; wearing sandals or shoes at appropriate places; brushing teeth twice a day; trimming nails; daily bathing; cleansing households; sleeping adequately; participating in sports and physical activity; and planting trees in the household or community.

The draft integrated nutrition messages were arranged in a logical sequence to be conveyed to the students according to their age following the suggestions of the key informants. Comprehension and Aesthetic tests were also carried out among students, mothers, and teachers, which helped fine-tuning the messages. Thereafter, the draft messages were modified and finalized based on the feedback of the members of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

The final integrated nutrition messages are a set of simple, practical, and culturally appropriate regardless of the age of students. A two-week pre and post-test trials of improved practices (TIPs) was carried out to validate the newly framed integrated nutrition messages among the students.

Findings of the study suggested that sensitization on the integrated nutrition messages improved both knowledge and practices on healthy diet and lifestyle among the students of different grades.

The students encompassed classes from pre-primary to class-10, segregated into three groups. The first group included pre-primary to class-2, the second group from class-3 to class-7 and the third group from class-8 to class-10. The content of the integrated messages was thematically the same across the three groups such as, healthy diets, nutrition, immunity, sanitation and hygiene, lifestyle, and environment. The set of thematic messages was logically developed with progressive addition of contents for students of primary, middle, and high school. The comprehensiveness of the narratives in the messages was increased, considering the cohorts from lower to higher groups, and the images were matched according to the age and learning ability of the student groups. They are concise, integrated and are detailed in two pages with pictorial images and narrative illustrations.

Implications for Policy

- Simple, practical, and culturally appropriate messages on integrated nutrition issues can serve as a means to educate and motivate students and parents for fostering good food habits, eating healthier diets, and practicing sustainable lifestyles.
- Reinforcing the messages on the visible pages of the textbooks by the NCTB might prove to be an effective way to bring about changes in nutrition knowledge, and improve practices among the students.
- The integrated messages could also be communicated in schools through digital media, posters, cartoons, and other web-based platforms.
- The integrated messages, which are applicable to all school age groups, can be suitably implemented by the different ministries of the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development partners, through various platforms to reach out to the same population cohorts across national and sub national levels.

This fact sheet presents the summary of a research study undertaken by *BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University*, with support under the Research Grants Scheme (RGS) of the Meeting the Undernutrition Challenge (MUCH) project. MUCH is implemented in collaboration with the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit of the Ministry of Food with technical support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

MUCH is financially supported by the European Union (EU) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The opinions expressed in this fact sheet are attributed to the research team and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Bangladesh, FAO, EU or USAID. For further information and comments: fpmu.gov.bd, Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU), Ministry of Food, Khaddya Bhaban, 16 Abdul Ghani Road, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh