



## ANALYSIS OF OBSTACLES IN IMPLEMENTING HEALTHY LIFESTYLE BEHAVIORS THROUGH BALANCED NUTRITIONAL EATING

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### ABSTRACT

Understanding of healthy food consumption patterns continues to evolve along with advances in science and technology. Therefore, an appropriate concept is needed for effective implementation. This study aims to identify the types of food and drinks children bring to school every day, examine the obstacles parents face in preparing nutritionally balanced lunches, and analyze various factors that influence school consistency in supporting the habit of bringing healthy lunches to children. This study used a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques including observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis process was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The data sources in this study involved school principals, teachers, and parents. The results showed that the variety of lunches brought by children to school did not fully meet the principles of balanced nutrition. On the other hand, most parents did not experience significant obstacles in preparing lunches. Factors influencing school consistency in implementing the habit of bringing nutritionally balanced lunches include the level of understanding of educators, the implementation of school programs, and support from the school environment.

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### INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education has a significant influence on shaping children's physical and cognitive growth. At this stage, brain development progresses rapidly, which affects not only behavior but also emotional capacity. For this reason, the implementation of a healthy lifestyle—reflected in constructive habits and a nutritionally balanced diet—is essential to support optimal development. Such a lifestyle for young children involves adequate consumption of nutritious food and drinks, maintaining overall health, engaging in regular physical activity, and obtaining sufficient rest.

Healthy Living Behavior (PHS) within the school environment represents a deliberate effort by both students and educators to prevent illness, foster a clean and healthy setting, and enhance overall well-being. Schools serve as strategic environments for introducing and reinforcing clean and healthy living practices from an early age. PHS extends beyond behavioral habits to include the provision of balanced nutritional intake. Healthy food refers to food that supplies essential nutrients required by the body and is free from harmful substances or disease-causing agents. However, individuals' dietary habits and attitudes play a crucial role in shaping their understanding of healthy food. Therefore, the consumption of nutritious food should be accompanied by consistent efforts to maintain hygiene and health.

Nutrition is a fundamental component required by the body and plays an essential role in supporting children's growth and development, including the maturation of the nervous system, brain function, and physical, mental, and intellectual capacities. Adequate nutritional intake contributes to the development of children into healthy, active, and capable individuals. Proper dietary patterns can enhance bodily functions and help prevent various health issues. The fulfillment of balanced nutrition should begin within the family by providing a diverse range of foods that include carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, and minerals. Consistent nutritional intake has a strong impact on both physical and cognitive development. In addition, maintaining clean and healthy living habits must be carried out consistently, with parents assuming a central role in ensuring that children's nutritional needs are met according to their developmental stages.

The concept of "four healthy, five perfect" is now considered insufficient to address the increasingly complex nutritional demands of modern society. Changes in lifestyle, the effects of urbanization, and growing global health challenges require a more comprehensive framework, namely the concept of balanced nutrition. This approach not only considers the quantity of nutrients such as carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals, but also emphasizes food quality, diversity of sources, and appropriate dietary choices that promote long-term health.

Based on Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, early childhood education includes developmental efforts from birth up to six years of age, aimed at supporting optimal physical and psychological growth. Adequate nutrition is a critical element in this process, as young children are highly active and require sufficient energy to sustain their activities and maintain good health. Proper nutritional status is

closely linked to successful growth and learning outcomes. Children's development should be continuously monitored from the prenatal period through early childhood, with active parental involvement to ensure that development aligns with each stage.

Issues related to malnutrition and unhealthy dietary patterns remain prevalent among children. Those aged between four and six years require appropriate dietary intake to support optimal growth. Inadequate nutrition can impede development and increase vulnerability to illness. Therefore, children must receive sufficient and high-quality nutrients through their daily food consumption.

Parents hold a crucial responsibility in promoting a healthy lifestyle, particularly in establishing positive eating habits from an early age. As primary role models within the family, parents are expected to demonstrate healthy food choices and consumption patterns. Nevertheless, some parents still have limited awareness regarding the importance of proper nutrition for their children. The excessive intake of fast food and sugary beverages can adversely affect children's health, both in the short term and over time.

Based on this background, the research problems include identifying the variety of food and beverages brought by children to school each day, examining the challenges faced by parents in preparing nutritionally balanced meals, and analyzing the factors that influence schools' consistency in promoting the practice of bringing healthy, balanced meals. Accordingly, the objectives of this study are to explore the diversity of children's daily meals, determine the obstacles encountered by parents, and evaluate the factors affecting the consistency of schools in implementing balanced nutrition practices.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative design. As explained by Zuchri Abdussamad (2020), qualitative research is an approach used to examine phenomena in their natural context, emphasizing the collection of data based on empirical realities in the field, rather than aiming to test predetermined hypotheses or theories.

The participants in this study consisted of Playgroup (Kober) teachers, Class A teachers, Class B teachers, and the school principal. In addition, the research involved 23 parents of students from Kemala Bhayangkari 05 Kindergarten. Data were gathered using interviews, observations, and documentation techniques. The data analysis process was conducted through several stages, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Qualitative data analysis was performed in an interactive and ongoing manner

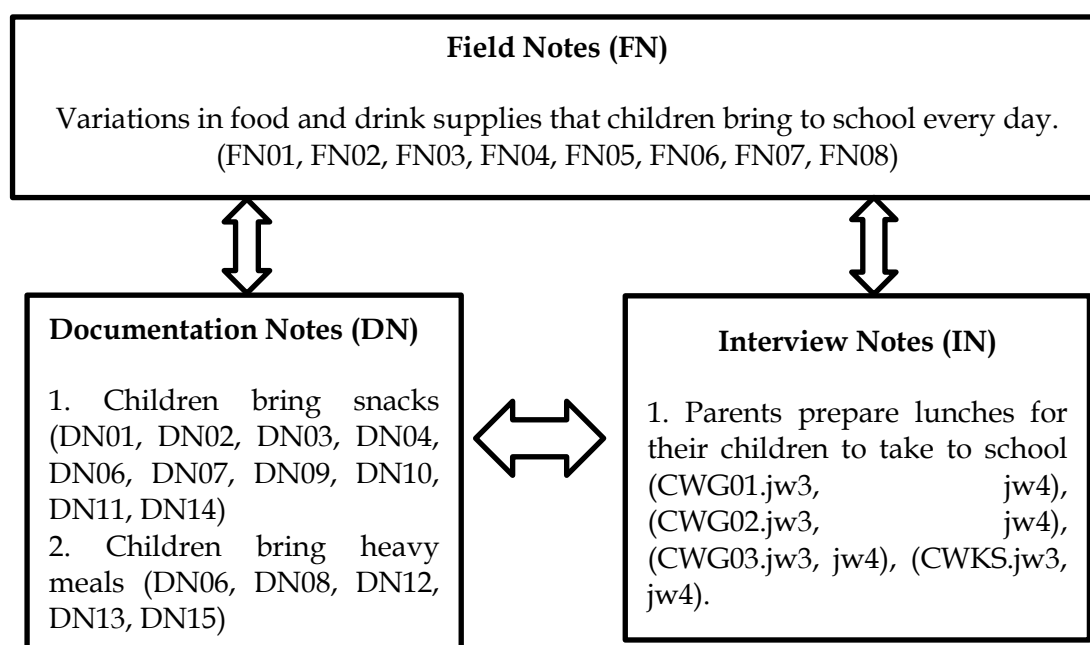
until data saturation was achieved. The analysis involved organizing and simplifying the collected information, presenting the data systematically, and formulating conclusions based on the findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Variations in food and drink supplies that children bring to school every day

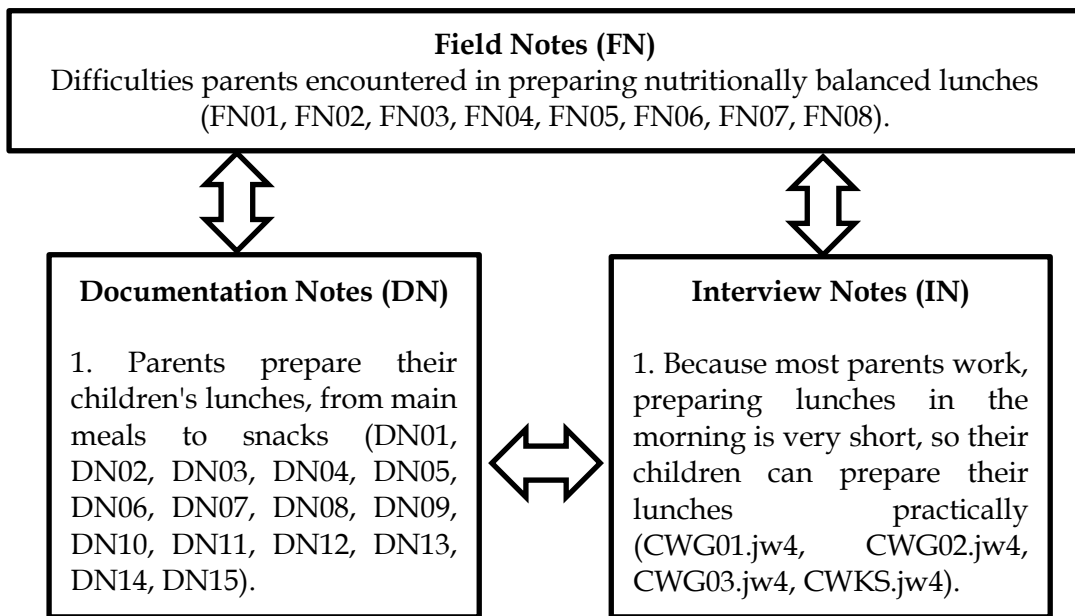
Through observations, interviews, and documentation carried out by the researchers, it was found that the types of lunches children brought did not entirely meet the criteria for balanced nutrition. While some children brought meals consisting of rice, vegetables, fruits, and protein sources such as eggs, chicken, or fish, snack foods still comprised the majority of the lunches. This pattern was influenced by several factors, including children having already eaten breakfast at home, parents preparing only light meals, and children's preference for snacks over more complete meals. These findings are supported by field notes (FN01, FN02, FN03, FN04, FN05, FN06, FN07, FN08), principal interview notes (CWKS.jw3, jw4), teacher interview notes (CWG01.jw3, jw4; CWG02.jw3, jw4; CWG03.jw3, jw4), and documentation notes (DN01, DN02, DN03, DN04, DN05, DN06, DN07, DN08, DN09, DN10, DN11, DN12, DN13, DN14, DN15).



**Chart 1. Variations in food and drink supplies that children bring to school every day**

**Difficulties encountered by parents in preparing nutritious, balanced meals**

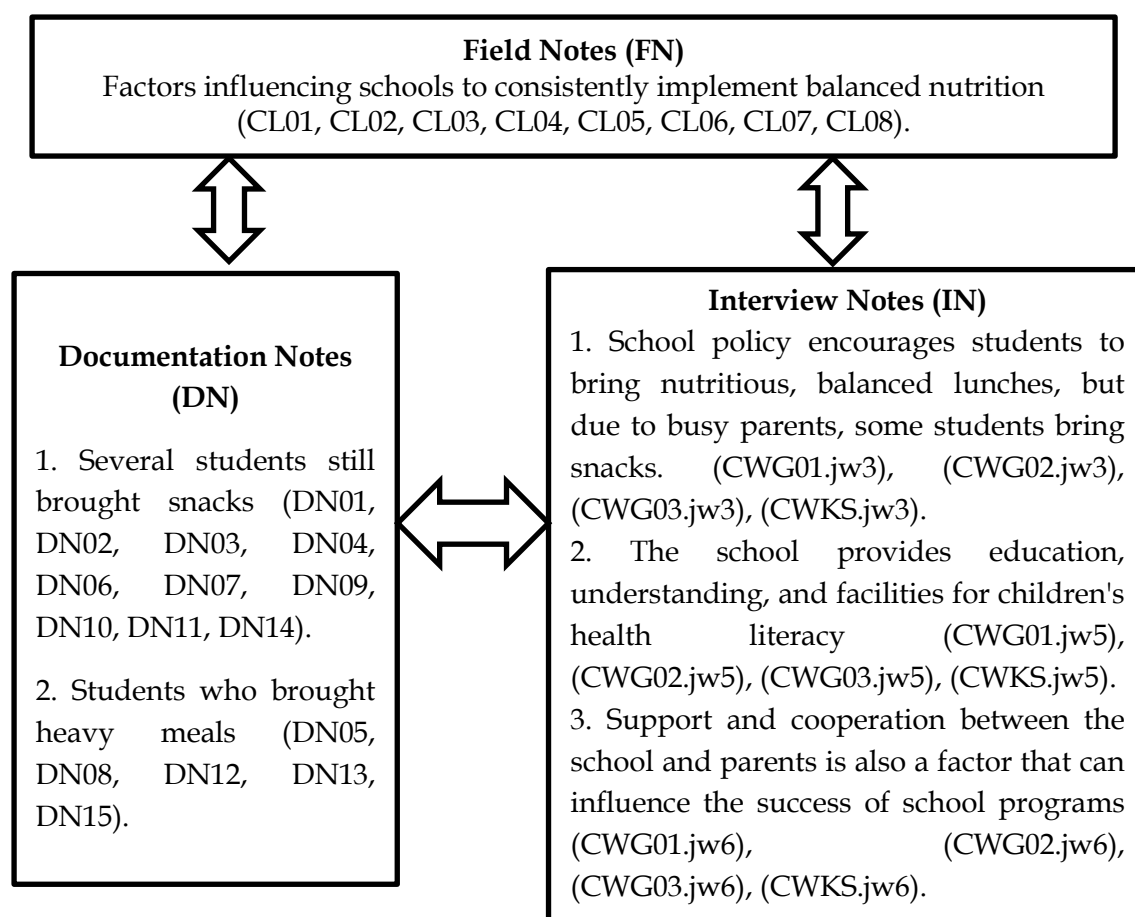
Drawing on the results of observations, interviews, and document analysis, the researchers found that most parents do not encounter major challenges in providing nutritionally balanced meals for their children. Nevertheless, the meals prepared are typically quite simple. This situation is shaped by various factors, such as time constraints, the availability of ingredients, and the parents’ circumstances and preferences when preparing food. These findings are supported by field notes (CL01, CL02, CL03, CL04, CL05, CL06, CL07, CL08) and documentation notes (DN01, DN02, DN03, DN04, DN05, DN06, DN07, DN08, DN09, DN10, DN11, DN12, DN13, DN14, DN15).



**Chart 2. Difficulties encountered by parents in preparing nutritious, balanced meals**

**Factors that influence schools to consistently implement balanced nutritional provisions**

Findings from observations, interviews, and document review indicate that schools’ consistency in promoting the habit of children bringing balanced, nutritious lunches is shaped by a range of factors. These include the level of teachers’ knowledge, how the lunch program is implemented, and the presence of an environment that supports this practice. These findings are reinforced by interviews with teachers and school principals. These data were recorded in teacher interviews (CWG01.jw1, jw2, jw3, jw4, jw5, jw6, jw7, jw8; CWG02.jw1, jw2, jw3, jw4, jw5, jw6, jw7, jw8; CWG03.jw1, jw2, jw3, jw4, jw5, jw6, jw7, jw8) and interviews with school principals (CWKS.jw1, jw2, jw3, jw4, jw5, jw6, jw7, jw8).



**Chart 3. 1that influence schools to consistently implement balanced nutritional provisions**

## Discussion

### Variations in food and drink supplies that children bring to school every day

Foods that adhere to the principles of balanced nutrition provide a range of essential nutrients, including carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, and minerals. Each of these nutrients serves a specific role, yet they work together to support a child’s overall growth and development. A child’s development can be assessed comprehensively, not only through physical indicators such as increases in height and weight, but also through progress in motor, social, emotional, and cognitive abilities (Hardiyanti, 2022).

The types of food and beverages parents prepare for their children’s school lunches show considerable variation. Some children are provided with complete meals consisting of staple foods like rice, accompanied by vegetables, fruits, and protein sources such as eggs, chicken, or fish. However, snack items still tend to make up a large portion of lunchbox contents. This pattern is influenced by factors such as children already eating breakfast at home, parents more frequently preparing snack-type foods, and children’s preferences for lighter options.

In addition, the diversity of food and drinks included in lunchboxes can enhance children's motivation and enthusiasm. Generally, students bring a mix of foods, ranging from main dishes to supplementary snacks. By offering a varied selection—such as staple foods, side dishes, vegetables, and snacks like fruit, bread, biscuits, or cakes—parents aim to ensure that their children receive adequate and balanced nutrition to support their learning activities at school.

### **Difficulties parents encounter in preparing nutritionally balanced provisions**

Ensuring that children receive healthy and nutritionally balanced meals each day is often a significant challenge for parents. Daily responsibilities, including work, household chores, and supporting children with their activities, can limit the time available to prepare nutritious meals. At the same time, parents are expected to provide practical and convenient menus that still meet their children's dietary needs, including carbohydrates, proteins, vegetables, and fruits.

Another challenge comes from children's inconsistent eating habits. They may refuse certain vegetables or fruits, prompting parents to find creative ways to make meals appealing while maintaining their nutritional value. This adds pressure on parents, who aim to support their children's optimal growth and development despite these constraints.

These challenges highlight that preparing a balanced, nutritious lunch involves more than simply placing food in a container. It requires careful planning, adequate food supplies, and a commitment to fulfilling children's daily nutritional requirements. Common obstacles parents encounter when preparing school lunches include (1) limited time, (2) availability of ingredients, and (3) children's personal preferences or tastes.

#### **1. Limited time availability**

Parents often face significant time constraints, particularly those with demanding work schedules, which can limit their ability to prepare healthy meals for their children. The pressure of balancing work and other responsibilities frequently leads them to opt for quicker, more convenient options—such as fast food or snacks—rather than cooking nutritious meals at home. This reliance on convenience foods can reduce attention to providing balanced nutrition, potentially affecting children's eating habits and overall health. Consequently, time limitations play a crucial role in shaping parents' food choices for their children, often increasing the consumption of fast food (Oberini, V., 2025).

In summary, busy schedules and competing responsibilities make it challenging for parents to consistently provide nutritious meals. The preference for ready-to-eat or snack foods, driven by limited time, can compromise children's nutritional intake and influence their eating patterns, highlighting time constraints as a key factor in determining what children eat.

## 2. Availability and quality of raw ingredients

Parents' ability to prepare nutritious lunches for their children is strongly affected by the selection and accessibility of food ingredients. The choice of ingredients is critical in planning lunch menus, as it influences the nutritional value, ease of preparation, and the appeal of the food to children. By choosing appropriate ingredients, parents can create meals that are healthy, practical, and suited to their children's preferences.

In conclusion, the selection, availability, and quality of ingredients play a key role in parents' capacity to prepare children's lunches. Ingredients not only determine the nutritional content but also affect how easily meals can be prepared and how attractive they are to children. Ideal ingredients are nutritious, readily available, affordable, and versatile enough for a variety of menu options. Additionally, parents' knowledge of ingredient properties and cooking methods is essential for enhancing the quality of lunch boxes. With the right ingredients and sufficient understanding, parents can provide meals that are healthy, practical, nutritionally balanced, and appealing to children.

## 3. Parental motivation and preferences

Parents' willingness to prepare lunches for their children plays a key role in ensuring a balanced and nutritious diet. School lunches serve not only as a source of essential nutrients but also as an opportunity to cultivate healthy eating habits from an early age. Although many parents understand the importance of providing nutritious meals, factors such as limited time, insufficient nutritional knowledge, and lack of cooking skills can sometimes make it challenging to prepare optimal lunches.

From this, it can be concluded that when parents are motivated and supported, they are able to prepare meals that satisfy their children's nutritional needs while promoting long-term healthy eating behaviors. Thoughtfully planned lunches function as a form of nutritional education and contribute to improving children's overall quality of life.

Observations and documentation gathered by researchers indicate that, in general, parents do not encounter major difficulties in preparing balanced meals for their children.

Nevertheless, the meals tend to be simple, shaped by factors such as time limitations, availability of ingredients, and parents' personal circumstances and preferences.

Data on challenges in preparing nutritious lunches were collected through field notes, documentation, and researcher observations. Several parents reported experiencing no significant obstacles, which was reflected in their consistent practice of providing a variety of meals—including rice, vegetables, fruits, and snacks—that their children regularly brought to school.

### **What factors influence schools to consistently provide balanced nutritional provisions to children?**

Schools have set policies mandating that parents provide lunches for their children. In practice, however, the consistent implementation of balanced and nutritious lunches is affected by several factors, including teachers' knowledge, the availability of facilities, how policies are executed, and support from the broader school environment. Key elements that support a school's ability to maintain consistency in providing nutritious, balanced lunches are: (1) educator knowledge, (2) effective policy implementation, and (3) a supportive environment. (Pratiwi et al., 2025).

#### **1. Knowledge**

A solid understanding of balanced nutrition is essential for promoting healthy eating habits among children, especially within the school setting. Teachers who are knowledgeable about nutritional principles can effectively guide, model, and encourage students to consume foods that meet their energy, protein, vitamin, and mineral requirements. This expertise also enables educators to identify suitable food options and assist children in selecting healthy lunches and menus.

From this, it can be concluded that teachers' comprehension of balanced nutrition is vital for fostering healthy eating habits in early childhood at school. With sufficient nutritional knowledge, teachers can act both as facilitators of nutrition education and as role models, demonstrating healthy eating behaviors for children. This understanding not only improves their ability to help children make nutritious food choices but also allows them to develop engaging and relevant learning activities. Strengthening teachers' knowledge of nutrition is therefore a key strategy for creating a school environment that supports healthy eating, meets children's nutritional needs, and promotes optimal growth and development from an early age.

## 2. Implementation

Applying the principles of balanced nutrition in schools is essential for promoting children's health, growth, and overall development. As influential learning environments, schools provide an effective platform for instilling healthy eating habits from an early age. Implementing balanced nutrition in schools involves offering foods that provide appropriate amounts of carbohydrates, proteins, healthy fats, vitamins, and minerals, as well as creating varied menus that maintain children's interest while ensuring comprehensive nutrition.

From this, it can be concluded that putting balanced nutrition into practice in schools is vital for supporting the well-being and development of young children. Schools serve a strategic role in familiarizing children with healthy eating through balanced meals, a variety of appealing foods, and the integration of nutrition education into the curriculum. Teachers and school staff play a key role, acting as both role models for healthy eating and guides in helping children choose and prepare nutritious meals. By fostering a supportive school environment, the implementation of balanced nutrition principles ensures that children's dietary needs are met, encourages long-lasting healthy eating habits, and helps prevent health issues such as obesity, anemia, and growth problems, thereby supporting optimal child development.

## 3. Encouraging and supportive surroundings

A nurturing and supportive environment is essential for the effective implementation of a balanced nutrition lunch program in schools. As key learning spaces for children, schools have a strategic role in promoting healthy eating habits by providing appropriate facilities, information, and guidance. A conducive school environment includes access to nutritious menus in the cafeteria, clean and comfortable dining areas, and easy availability of healthy food options, all of which encourage children to consume balanced and wholesome meals.

From this, it can be concluded that the success of a school-based balanced nutrition program largely depends on creating a supportive environment. This includes not only adequate facilities and easy access to nutritional information but also active involvement from parents as role models and mentors. When facilities, nutrition education, and family participation work together, children become more familiar with recognizing, selecting, and consuming healthy foods. Under such conditions, a balanced nutrition program can

be implemented effectively, offering long-term benefits for children's growth and development while helping to prevent health problems from an early age.

Schools are not only centers for academic learning but also strategic environments for fostering healthy lifestyle habits, including balanced dietary practices. Consistently implementing a balanced nutrition policy relies on several interconnected factors: teacher knowledge, program implementation, and the creation of a supportive environment.

Teacher knowledge forms the foundation. Educators with a thorough understanding of balanced nutrition principles can guide children, model healthy eating behaviors, and assist them in making nutritious food choices. Such knowledge also enables teachers to monitor and reinforce consistent adherence to healthy eating habits.

Program implementation within schools directly affects the sustainability of providing nutritious lunches. Schools that execute policies systematically and transparently are more successful in ensuring that children gain both knowledge and practical benefits from their meals. Effective implementation includes regular supervision, offering diverse and healthy lunches, and using engaging methods to motivate children to choose nutritious foods.

Finally, a supportive environment acts as a crucial external factor for success. When teachers, parents, and facilities such as healthy cafeterias provide encouragement and resources, children are more likely to adopt and maintain healthy eating practices. A positive and supportive school environment fosters motivation, awareness, and comfort with nutritious habits, helping children internalize these behaviors as part of their daily routine.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

The variety of foods that children bring for lunch often shows an imbalance between healthy and less nutritious options. Many children tend to favor convenient foods that suit their taste preferences, such as sweet snacks or fast food. These choices are frequently shaped by eating habits at home and children's preference for familiar or strongly flavored foods, even if these options are not always nutritionally adequate.

From this analysis, it can be concluded that parents face several challenges in preparing their children's lunches, including limited time, availability of ingredients, motivation to prepare meals, and children's food preferences. Among these, time constraints are particularly significant. Parents managing busy work and household schedules often find it difficult to plan and prepare lunch boxes that offer a balanced

nutritional variety. Because preparing high-quality, nutritionally balanced lunches can be time-consuming, many parents opt for quicker, more convenient alternatives, which are often less nutritious.

Several factors also affect how consistently schools can promote the habit of bringing balanced, nutritious lunches. First, teachers' knowledge of children's nutritional needs is critical for establishing healthy eating habits. Second, the application of balanced nutrition principles in daily school activities must be ongoing to help children understand the importance of maintaining good health. Third, the presence of adequate facilities supports a school environment conducive to healthy eating. Finally, parental involvement plays a crucial role in the program's success. Effective collaboration between schools and parents in preparing nutritionally balanced lunches is key to ensuring that children consistently bring healthy meals to school.

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