

**AN EXAMINATION OF NUTRITIONAL VALUES ON COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF PRE-SCHOOL
CHILDREN IN KIINE ZONE, KIRINYAGA COUNTY, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

Adequate nutrition for children lays the foundation for the development of cognitive, motor and socio-emotional throughout childhood and adulthood. Children without development of these skills during early life are at risk for later neuropsychological problems, poor school achievement, early school dropout, low skilled employment and poor care of children thus contributing to the intergenerational transmission of poverty. The purpose of the study was to examine nutritional values on cognitive development of pre-schoolers in Kiine Zone, Kirinyaga County. The study was guided by the following objectives to: establish the indicators of nutritional values on cognitive development of pre-schoolers, establish if parental education level affects the pre-schoolers diet, determine how household economic status affects pre-schoolers diet provision and assess the feeding strategies used in the improvement of diet for pre-schoolers in Kiine Zone. The study employed Cognitive Development Theory of Jean Piaget (1896-1990). The theory describes four stages of normal intellectual development from infancy through adulthood which healthy human beings pass. Cognitive development always follows sequence and that stages cannot be skipped and that each stage is marked by new intellectual abilities and complexity of understanding the world. The study employed a survey research design where qualitative data were collected. The study was conducted in Kiine Zone, Kirinyaga County. Kiine Zone had a population of eighteen public schools, six private day schools and four boarding schools. The representative sample was nine public pre-schools, and three private pre-schools. Piloting of the instruments was done in one of the public pre-school two weeks before the main study. Primary data were collected by use of questionnaires and observation checklist. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics. It entailed use of mean, mode and frequency. It also included use of total percentages, tabulations charts and graphs for better representation. Ethical issues were observed during the study. The study concludes that majority of pre-schoolers were not provided with balanced diet at any meal during the day. The study also observed that there was no statistical difference between parental education level and their knowledge of pre-schoolers dietary requirements. The study also concluded that parental occupation did not influence parental knowledge on value of a child's diet among pre-school mothers. The study recommends that more awareness should be given to parents by the ministries of Education and Health of the importance for providing a balanced diet to pre-schoolers. The parents should also be advised on how to use natural foods to meet the nutritional needs of the pre-schoolers without incurring much cost.