

The Role of Healthy Nutrition and Parental Care in Students' Academic Performance and Discipline

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ABSTRACT

The academic success and behaviour of students are influenced by a combination of factors, with healthy nutrition and parental care playing critical roles. A well-balanced diet is essential for cognitive function, emotional stability, and overall physical health, while parental involvement ensures a supportive learning environment. This paper examines the influence of these two factors on students' academic performance and discipline. By reviewing current literature and studies, it becomes clear that proper nutrition enhances concentration, memory, and cognitive abilities, while active parental care contributes to motivation, goal setting, and behaviour management. The findings underscore the importance of collaboration between schools, parents, and the wider community to ensure that students have access to proper nutrition and family support, which collectively contribute to academic excellence and good discipline.

Keywords: academic, behaviour, healthy, nutrition, excellence, parental, cognitive, Family support, stability, environment, discipline, performance, access.

INTRODUCTION

Academic performance and discipline are crucial elements of a student's educational journey. While traditional focus has been placed on school-based factors, there is growing recognition that nutrition and parental involvement are fundamental to students' success. Nutrition, particularly during formative years, directly influences brain development, energy levels, and the ability to concentrate and retain information. Conversely, parental care, which includes emotional support, encouragement, and involvement in a child's education, promotes a positive attitude towards learning and instils good discipline.

This paper seeks to explore how healthy nutrition and parental care impact students' academic performance and discipline, drawing upon existing research to highlight key correlations. By understanding the intricate connection between these factors, it becomes clear that supporting students through proper nutrition and active parental engagement is essential for fostering an environment where academic achievement and discipline can thrive.

The Role of Healthy Nutrition in Academic Performance

Nutrition is crucial for brain development and cognitive function, directly affecting a student's ability to learn, concentrate, and perform well academically. Healthy eating improves overall well-being, helps regulate mood, and enhances cognitive abilities such as memory, problem-solving, and focus.

Cognitive and Physical Development

- **Brain Function:** The brain requires essential nutrients such as Omega-3 fatty acids, proteins, vitamins, and minerals to perform optimally. Nutrients from sources like fish, nuts, and leafy vegetables support brain functions related to memory, attention, and processing speed.
- **Energy Levels:** Proper nutrition ensures that students maintain steady energy levels throughout the school day. For instance, a balanced breakfast with proteins, carbohydrates, and healthy fats can prevent midday energy slumps that hinder concentration.
- **Mood Regulation:** Nutrient-rich diets that include fruits, vegetables, and whole grains have been shown to improve emotional stability, reducing feelings of anxiety, depression, and irritability, which are linked to academic struggles.

Nutrition and Academic Achievement

- **Attention and Memory:** Studies suggest that students who consume a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins perform better in tasks requiring attention, memory, and decision-making skills.
- **Improved Test Scores:** Research has demonstrated that students who are properly nourished tend to have higher academic test scores compared to their malnourished peers, as their cognitive functions are supported by adequate nutrients.

The Role of Parental Care in Academic Performance and Discipline

Parental involvement has a profound influence on student outcomes. When parents actively engage with their children's education, students exhibit better academic results, stronger motivation, and better discipline. Parental care involves a range of actions including emotional support, encouragement, setting expectations, and creating a conducive home environment for learning.

Parental Support and Emotional Engagement

- **Supportive Environment:** Children who feel supported by their parents are more likely to excel academically. A caring and supportive home environment encourages children to value education, fosters self-esteem, and helps build a strong foundation for learning.
- **Emotional Stability:** Parental involvement also contributes to emotional stability. Positive reinforcement and open communication between parents and children help mitigate stress and anxiety, enabling students to focus better and stay motivated.

Disciplinary Influence of Parental Care

- **Setting Expectations:** Parents who set clear academic goals and expectations tend to raise students who exhibit better self-control, focus, and discipline. Clear communication of goals, consequences, and rewards for good behaviour leads to more responsible students.
- **Behavioral Management:** Active parental care ensures that students understand boundaries and rules. Parents who monitor and guide their children's behavior—whether through encouraging positive study habits, setting limits on screen time, or reinforcing the importance of respect—help students stay disciplined both inside and outside the classroom.

Parental Education and Involvement in School Activities

- **Educational Support:** Parents who engage in their children's education, such as attending parent-teacher meetings, assisting with homework, or advocating for their children's needs, send a message about the

importance of education. This involvement directly impacts academic performance and behavioural patterns.

- **School Engagement:** Research shows that when parents take an active role in school-related activities, such as volunteering or attending school events, it positively influences their children's academic performance and discipline.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Healthy Nutrition and Parental Care on Academic Performance and Discipline

Advantages of Healthy Nutrition

1. Improved Cognitive Function

- Proper nutrition, including essential nutrients like Omega-3 fatty acids, proteins, vitamins, and minerals, supports brain development and cognitive function.
- This results in improved memory, attention, problem-solving skills, and the ability to learn efficiently.
- A diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids, found in fish, helps enhance cognitive functions such as memory retention and concentration, which are crucial for academic success.

2. Increased Energy and Focus

- A balanced diet provides steady energy throughout the day, which helps students remain focused and attentive in class.
- Low-energy levels from poor nutrition can lead to fatigue and decreased academic performance.
- A healthy breakfast, such as whole grains and fruit, can maintain energy levels and prevent mid-morning fatigue, allowing students to engage more actively in lessons.

3. Better Emotional and Behavioural Regulation

- Good nutrition supports the regulation of mood and emotional health, reducing irritability and anxiety.
- This emotional balance can contribute to better behaviour in the classroom.
- Nutrients like magnesium, vitamin D, and zinc have been shown to reduce anxiety and mood swings, contributing to a more

stable emotional state that promotes positive behaviour and discipline.

4. Enhanced Academic Performance

- Well-nourished students tend to perform better academically because they can concentrate longer, recall information more effectively, and approach tasks with greater energy and motivation.
- Studies show that students with good nutrition tend to have higher test scores and better grades due to improved cognitive abilities and focus.

Disadvantages of Healthy Nutrition

1. Cost of Nutritious Food

- Healthy and nutritious foods can be expensive, which may limit access for students from low-income families.
- This disparity can create inequalities in students' academic performance.
- Fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and organic foods can be costly, making it difficult for some families to provide these healthy options regularly.

2. Challenges in Access to Healthy Food

- In some areas, particularly rural or underserved communities, access to fresh, healthy food may be limited.
- This can result in children relying on unhealthy, processed food options.
- "Food deserts" in many regions prevent access to fresh produce, forcing families to rely on cheap, calorie-dense but nutrient-poor foods.

3. Cultural and Personal Preferences

- Some students may not enjoy healthy foods due to cultural preferences or taste, which can lead to a lack of interest in consuming nutritious meals.
- If a child dislikes vegetables or whole grains, they may resist eating them, resulting in poor dietary habits that affect their health and academic performances.

Advantages of Parental Care

1. Improved Academic Motivation and Performance

- When parents are involved in their child's education, students are more likely to stay motivated, set academic goals, and perform well in school.

- Parental encouragement leads to a positive attitude toward learning.
- Parents who praise their children's efforts and celebrate academic achievements help build intrinsic motivation, which fosters greater academic success.

2. Positive Discipline and Behaviour

Parents who provide structure, set clear expectations, and enforce consistent rules help students develop good discipline and behaviour.

Students with supportive parents tend to display respect for authority and better self-control.

- A child whose parents enforce rules about homework, screen time, and bedtimes is more likely to have good study habits and demonstrate responsible behaviour in school.

3. Emotional Support and Stability

- Parental care provides emotional support, which is crucial for students' mental health and well-being.
- Students with emotionally supportive parents tend to experience less stress and anxiety, leading to better academic outcomes.
- Parents who listen to their children's concerns, provide encouragement during difficult times, and offer comfort during academic challenges contribute to greater emotional stability and resilience.

4. Improved Social Skills and Personal Development

- Active parental involvement helps students develop strong social skills by teaching values such as empathy, communication, and teamwork.
- This also contributes to positive peer relationships and self-confidence.
- Parents who encourage children to participate in social or extracurricular activities help them develop a broad range of interpersonal skills that benefit both academic and social performance.

Disadvantages of Parental Care

1. Over-Parenting or Helicopter Parenting

- While parental involvement is important, excessive control or over-parenting can lead to stress, anxiety, and a lack of independence in students.
- Children may struggle to make their own decisions and take responsibility for their learning.

Overbearing parents who do their children's homework for them or micromanage every aspect of their education can hinder the development of problem-solving skills and self-reliance.

2. Time Constraints and Work Schedules

- Many parents, especially those with demanding jobs, may not have the time or energy to be actively involved in their children's education.
- This lack of parental engagement can impact a child's motivation and academic performance.
- Single-parent households or parents working long hours may find it challenging to attend school meetings, assist with homework, or monitor their child's behaviour.

3. Cultural and Socioeconomic Barriers

- Parents from different cultural backgrounds or lower socioeconomic statuses may lack the resources, knowledge, or experience to support their children's academic needs effectively.
- Parents who did not attend school themselves or who face language barriers may find it difficult to understand the school system, communicate with teachers, or support their children's academic challenges.

4. Parental Stress and Mental Health

- Parents who are dealing with personal or financial stress may struggle to provide the emotional and practical support needed for their children's academic success.
- Children may absorb these stresses, which can negatively affect their behaviour and performance.
- Parents experiencing financial hardship may be unable to provide the necessary academic resources or create a stable environment for their children, leading to poor academic outcomes.

How Governments Can Play a Role in Healthy Nutrition,

Parental Care, and Discipline

Governments play an essential role in shaping societal norms, policies, and access to resources that influence children's well-being, academic success, and behaviour. In developing countries, where challenges in education, nutrition, and parental support are often compounded by socio-economic factors, the role of government becomes even more crucial. Below are the ways in which governments can impact healthy nutrition, parental care, and discipline for better academic performance and overall student development.

Role of Government in Healthy Nutrition

Governments can significantly influence the nutritional status of children through policies, programs, and public health campaigns. Healthy nutrition is essential for cognitive development, emotional well-being, and overall health, all of which contribute to academic performance and behaviour.

Key Government Actions:

1. National School Feeding Programs:

- Governments can implement school feeding programs to ensure all students, particularly those from low-income families, receive nutritious meals during school hours.
- Many countries, like Brazil and India, have school meal programs that provide daily meals, ensuring that children receive the nutrients necessary for optimal learning and behaviour.

2. Subsidies for Nutrient-Dense Foods

- Governments can subsidize the cost of fruits, vegetables, and other nutrient-rich foods to make them more affordable for low-income families.
- In several developing countries, governments have partnered with food distribution systems to provide healthier food options at subsidized prices for families in rural areas.

3. Public Health Campaigns and Education

- Governments can launch awareness campaigns to educate the public on the importance of healthy eating habits for children.
- These campaigns can provide information on nutrition, the dangers of

processed foods, and how balanced diets contribute to a child's development.

- Governments in countries like Kenya have run media campaigns to promote the consumption of local, nutritious foods like vegetables and fruits, while also discouraging processed, sugary snacks.

4. Regulation of Junk Food and Marketing

- Governments can regulate the marketing of unhealthy food products, particularly those aimed at children.
- Restricting advertisements for high-sugar and high-fat foods can reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food options.
- The United Kingdom has implemented laws to restrict junk food advertisements aimed at

children on television and social media platforms.

5. Nutritional Guidelines in Schools

- Governments can establish and enforce nutritional standards for food served in schools, ensuring that meals meet the dietary needs of growing children.
- The United States has federal guidelines (e.g., the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act) that set nutritional standards for school meals, encouraging the inclusion of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Table 1: Relationship Between Nutrition, Parental Care, and Academic Outcomes

Factor	Effect on Academic Performance	Effect on Discipline
Healthy Nutrition	Improved cognitive function, memory, focus	Enhanced emotional stability, reduced irritability
Healthy Nutrition	Increased motivation, higher academic achievement	Better self-control, understanding of boundaries
Balanced Diet (Proteins, Vitamins, and Minerals)	Enhanced concentration, improved test scores	Positive behavioural habits, lower risk of misbehaviour
Supportive Parental Care	Increased confidence, academic persistence	Reduced disruptive behaviour, enhanced respect for authority
Family Engagement in School Activities	Better understanding of schoolwork, improved academic outcomes	Improved behavioural expectations and better social skills

Role of Government in Parental Care and Support

Parental care is critical in shaping a child's academic success and behaviour. Governments can play a significant role in empowering parents and supporting them in their parenting responsibilities.

- Countries like Singapore offer parenting workshops that focus on fostering positive relationships between parents and children, teaching effective communication, and stress management techniques.

2. Access to Affordable Childcare Services

- Governments can provide affordable or subsidized childcare services that enable parents to work while ensuring their children are in safe, educational environments.
- Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Norway provide subsidized or free early childhood education and care, which

helps working parents while promoting early learning and social skills.

3. Parental Leave Policies

- By implementing paid parental leave policies, governments can support parents in spending crucial time with their young children during early childhood, which can positively impact children's academic and behavioural development.
- In countries like Finland, both mothers and fathers are entitled to extensive paid parental leave, allowing parents to bond with their children and provide the early care and support necessary for emotional and cognitive development.

4. Family Counselling and Support Services

- Governments can establish community centres or programs that provide counselling, support groups, and resources for parents facing challenges in raising children, such as mental health support, domestic violence assistance, or financial aid.
- In countries like South Korea, government-backed family counselling services help parents address parenting difficulties, enhancing both the family dynamic and children's behaviour.

5. Financial Support for Low-Income Families

- Governments can provide financial assistance, such as child allowances or subsidies for low-income families, to ensure parents have the resources to properly care for their children.
- Brazil's Bolsa Família program provides financial assistance to low-income families, helping them afford basic needs, including food, healthcare, and education, which in turn supports better parental care.

3. Role of Government in Promoting Discipline

Discipline in schools and homes is essential for creating environments conducive to learning and personal development. Governments have a significant role in shaping policies that promote positive behaviour and discipline both in the classroom and in the broader community.

Key Government Actions:

1. School Discipline Policies

- Governments can set clear national guidelines and regulations on acceptable

student behaviour, helping to create a consistent approach to discipline across schools.

- Governments can implement national codes of conduct for students, outlining expectations regarding behaviour, attendance, and academic performance, ensuring that schools enforce discipline in a consistent and fair manner.

2. Positive Discipline Frameworks

- Governments can support schools in adopting positive discipline techniques that focus on teaching students appropriate behaviour through encouragement and positive reinforcement, rather than punitive measures.
- Programs like the "Restorative Justice" approach, which some governments in the Pacific region have adopted, encourage students to take responsibility for their actions and engage in problem-solving rather than merely punishing misbehaviour.

3. Training for Teachers and School Leaders

Governments can invest in training teachers and school leaders to manage classroom behaviour effectively, provide emotional support to students, and promote a respectful learning environment.

- Teacher training programs in many countries, such as Rwanda, include modules on classroom management, conflict resolution, and promoting positive behaviour to create supportive school climates.

4. Legislation on Child Protection and Rights

- Governments can pass and enforce laws that protect children from abuse, exploitation, and neglect, which can contribute to behavioural and emotional issues.
- Protecting children's rights and welfare ensures that they feel safe and supported in their learning environment.
- International frameworks, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, have been incorporated into national laws in many countries, ensuring children's protection from harm and

promoting discipline based on respect for their rights.

5. Community Engagement and Support

- Governments can involve communities in supporting disciplined behaviour by creating programs that engage families, schools, and local authorities in promoting positive behaviours and preventing violence or delinquency.
- The government of Kenya, for example, has implemented community-based programs where local leaders, parents, and schools collaborate to reduce youth violence and enhance positive discipline practices in schools.

CONCLUSION

The influence of healthy nutrition and parental care on students' academic performance and discipline cannot be overstated. Proper nutrition supports cognitive development, energy levels, and emotional regulation, which in turn, enhances a student's ability to focus, perform well academically, and maintain good behaviour. Meanwhile, parental care fosters an environment where students feel supported, motivated, and encouraged to excel academically while maintaining discipline.

To ensure that students succeed academically and demonstrate positive behaviours, it is essential for schools, parents, and communities to work together to provide students with the nutritional resources and emotional support they need. This collaboration helps create a balanced and conducive environment for student success, not only in terms of academic achievement but also in terms of developing important life skills such as responsibility, focus, and self-regulation.

Both healthy nutrition and parental care are integral to a student's academic performance and discipline. While the advantages of these factors are significant, there are also challenges that need to be addressed. Healthy nutrition supports cognitive function, energy, and emotional stability, contributing to better learning outcomes, but access to quality food can be a barrier for some families. Parental care motivates students, instils discipline, and provides emotional support, but excessive control or time constraints can hinder students' development.

For optimal academic and behavioural outcomes, a balanced approach to nutrition and parental involvement is necessary. Schools, communities, and policymakers must collaborate to address the barriers to access healthy nutrition and ensure that parents have the support and resources to be actively

involved in their children's education.

Governments in developing countries have a vital role in ensuring that children receive the proper nutrition, care, and discipline needed for academic success and personal growth. By implementing policies that address nutritional standards, provide parental support, and foster environments of discipline, governments can create an ecosystem that supports the holistic development of students. These efforts not only enhance individual academic performance but also contribute to the broader development of societies by raising well-educated, healthy, and disciplined future generations.

Governments should continue to invest in policies that remove barriers to healthy living, support families, and promote positive behavioural norms, ensuring that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have equal opportunities to thrive academically and socially.

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