

Enhancing school-based nutrition-education programmes for special needs education – insights from a qualitative study

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Schools provide an ideal setting for educating children about healthy and sustainable nutrition, including the 5% of children in the Netherlands who receive special needs education due to a disability, psychological and/or behavioural challenges. Currently, there is a scarcity of nutrition-education programmes available for these pupils. This study aimed to identify necessary adjustments to existing school-based nutrition-education programmes to better suit primary and secondary special needs education.

In this qualitative study, 18 semi-structured interviews with teachers and other professionals were conducted between November 2022 and January 2023. The data analysis was carried out with the software program Atlas.ti. A six-phase analysis process as per Braun and Clarke was followed, including transcribing, coding and summarizing the interviews by theme.

The results of this study show that, similar to regular education, special needs education schools increasingly pay attention to healthy and sustainable nutrition. To optimize nutrition-education programmes for special needs education, it is important to adapt both the format and content of the lessons. A visual and active approach, simple lay-out and a fixed structure of the lessons seem to be the key to success. The capabilities of the children together with the usefulness of the lessons in daily practice are the starting points when developing the lessons.

Taking into account that primary and secondary special needs education has an enormous diversity in pupils, it seems possible to adapt and develop nutrition-education programmes to better suit special needs education.



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