

Perceptions of Parents, Teachers, and Caregivers on the Long-Term Sustainability of an Oral Health Curriculum in Indian Schools: A Cross-Sectional Study

Hindol Das, Ph.D. Scholar & Clinical Scientist (Indian Council of Medical Research- ICMR)

Department of Public Health Dentistry, Amrita School of Dentistry, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi, Kerala, India

Introduction

- Oral health plays a critical role in maintaining overall health and well-being, particularly during childhood, when habits and behaviors are developed.
- Given the importance of preventive measures, integrating oral health education into school curricula can positively influence children's long-term health behaviors.
- However, the success of these programs largely depends on the perceptions and support of key stakeholders—parents, teachers, and caregivers—who play a pivotal role in the education and upbringing of children.
- This study aims to assess the perceptions, attitudes, and concerns of these stakeholders regarding the sustainability of an oral health curriculum in schools.
- The findings will help identify potential facilitators and barriers to successfully implementing and maintaining effective school oral health curriculum in the long run.

Aim & Objectives

Aim: To explore the perceptions of parents, teachers, and caregivers regarding the sustainability of an oral health curriculum in schools.

First Objective- To assess the awareness and importance of oral health education among parents, teachers, and caregivers.

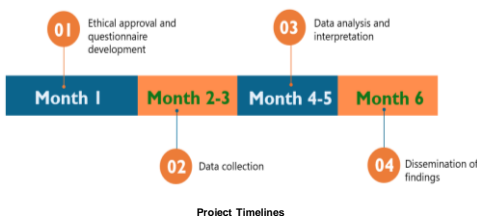
Second Objective- To evaluate attitudes towards the introduction and sustainability of an oral health curriculum in schools

Third Objective- To identify perceived challenges and necessary support for implementing oral health education.

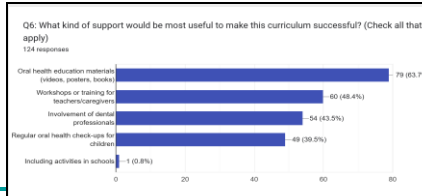
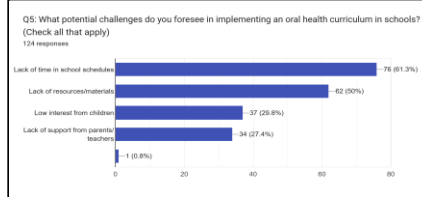
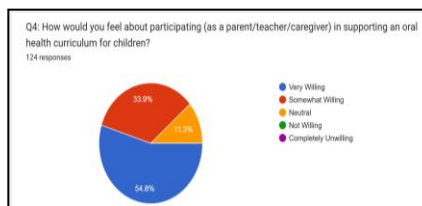
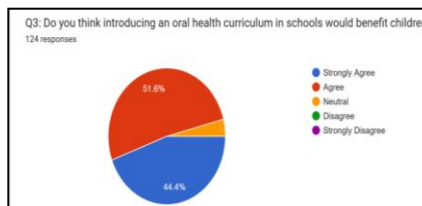
Fourth Objective- To gather open-ended feedback on improving oral health curricula.

Method

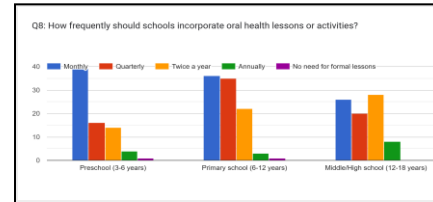
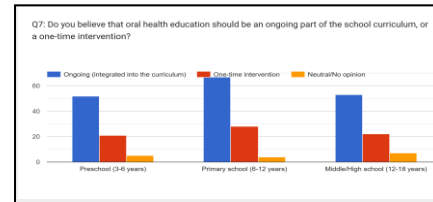
Study design	A Cross-sectional study design.
Study population & Eligibility criteria	Inclusion criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents, teachers, and caregivers of children attending schools that have implemented or are considering implementing oral health curriculum. Participants willing to provide informed consent and complete the questionnaire. Exclusion criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals who have not been involved in the educational process of children in the school setting. Non-consent to participate in the survey.
School selection	English medium Schools in Ernakulam, Kerala.
Data Collection	A structured questionnaire administered both online (via Email, WhatsApp groups, and School networks) and offline in schools.
Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative Analysis: Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, etc) for close-ended responses. Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analysis for open-ended responses to extract recurring themes and insights.
Ethical Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethical Approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee (ECASAM-AIMS-2025-002). Informed Consent was sought from all participants, and they were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality.



Results



44.2% of the respondents were parents, 39.8% teachers, and 15.9% were caregivers, representing key stakeholders in children's oral health education. Preschool (3-5 years) were 26.3%, Primary school (6-12 years) were 42.1%, and Middle/High school (12-18 years) were 31.6%. This broad distribution highlights the importance of age-appropriate curriculum integration.



While 63.7% of respondents are aware of existing oral health programs, 22.6% are unsure, and 13.7% report no such initiatives in school/community. The majority of respondents believe that oral health education is either Very Important (54.8%) or Important (37.1%) for children.

Conclusion

- The study highlights a strong consensus on the importance of integrating oral health education into school curricula and the urgent need of an oral health curriculum in India.
- While strong support exists among parents, teachers, and caregivers, challenges like time constraints and resource limitations must be addressed.
- Sustainable implementation requires engaging learning materials, teacher training, and active participation from dental professionals.
- Regular sessions, rather than one-time interventions, are key to fostering lifelong oral hygiene habits. A collaborative, school-based approach can transform oral health awareness and prevention, ensuring a healthier future for children.

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