

# A Qualitative Analysis of Elementary Education Student's Perceptions of Breakfast in the Classroom Before and After an Educational Video Intervention

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**KEYWORDS:** Breakfast in the classroom, school breakfast, school nutrition, qualitative

## INTRODUCTION:

The National School Breakfast Program (SBP) was permanently established in 1975 (USDA, 2023a) and now serves approximately 15 million students daily (USDA, 2023a). Research has identified multiple benefits students receive from participating in school breakfast, including improved academic performance, school connectedness, attendance, and health markers (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Hamilton, 2017; Hoyland et al., 2009; Deshmukh-Taskar et al., 2013; Rampersaud, 2005). Daily consumption of breakfast is also associated with a lower BMI (Gleason & Dodd, 2009; Rampersaud et al., 2005).

Would include some information here about low participation rates in the SBP, especially when compared to the NSLP. Although there are many benefits to participation in the SBP participation rates are low compared to participation rates for the NSLP. A recent report (2021–2022 school year) indicated that for every 100 children participating in school lunch there were only 52 children that participated in school breakfast (Food Research and Action Center 2023). In order to increase students' access to the SBP, four alternate school breakfast models are often utilized in addition to traditional breakfast service. These models include breakfast in the classroom (BIC), grab-and-go breakfast, second-chance breakfast, and breakfast vending (USDA 2023b). These alternative breakfast models have received increasing attention due to increased school breakfast participation when compared with the traditional breakfast model (Anzman-Frasca et al., 2015; Corcoran et al., 2016; Farris et al. 2022; Hecht et al., 2023; Walker et al., 2021; Yeh et al., 2023).

Although research shows benefits to alternative breakfast models, stakeholders and administrators have mixed feelings regarding their use and have expressed hesitation to consider alternative models (Spruance et al. 2019). Specifically, teachers have identified several concerns regarding the use of BIC including messes in the classroom, distraction, less time for instruction, and the nutritional quality of breakfast (Krueger et al., 2018 & McKeon et al., 2021). In fact, Krueger et al. (2018) found BIC to be the least preferred breakfast model among teachers.



The hesitation expressed by teachers towards BIC is a barrier to implementing alternative breakfast models (Folta et al., 2016, & Krueger et al., 2018 & McKeon et al., 2021). Improving teacher perceptions of alternate breakfast models, especially BIC, is critical. An educational video regarding BIC has the potential to educate EI Ed majors and encourage them to be more receptive of alternate SBP models now and later in their career. The purpose of this study was to qualitatively assess EI Ed major's readiness to implement BIC and identify whether an educational video could improve their perception of BIC.

## **METHODS:**

### **Study Design and Recruitment**

A pre-test, post-test survey design was selected to evaluate EI Ed majors' perceptions of BIC. Both the pre- and post-survey were designed in Qualtrics (Provo Utah, 2019) and included identical questions. The final survey contained a total of 27 questions related to participants' experiences with breakfast and SBP (n=5), perceptions and knowledge of SBPs and BIC (n=11) readiness to implement SBP (n=3), as well as basic demographic questions (n=8, gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, household income). Prior to recruitment and data collection and expert panel (n=2) and cognitive interviews (n=3) were conducted to verify the content and face validity of the instrument. A recruitment flyer inviting EI Ed majors to take the pre-test survey was shown in EI Ed classes and an email was sent by the department secretary to all EI Ed students from one University who had not yet started student teaching. One week after completing the pre-test survey, participants received the educational video and post-test survey via email. The chance to win one of 30 \$50 amazon gift cards was offered as an incentive. This study was approved as an exempt study by the [blinded for review] Institutional Review Board (IRB#: IRB2019-347).

### **Data Analysis**

Demographic data from the survey were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated. Qualitative data were analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis approach. Responses to the following three open-response survey questions were analyzed: (1) "Why do you think School Breakfast Program participation is so low in [blinded for review]," (2) "How would you assess your readiness as a teacher to support Breakfast in the Classroom?" and (3) "What concerns might you have about implementing Breakfast in the Classroom as a teacher?" Members of the research team analyzed the data through the coder reliability method (Braun et al. 2018, Braun and Clarke 2006). After independently immersing themselves in the data, the research team met and discussed possible themes. The three overarching themes identified were (1) knowledge and readiness, (2) logistics, (3) and social implications. A code book was then developed, and two trained research assistants coded the pre-survey and post-survey responses independently into the three themes. One member of the research team who did not participate in coding, reviewed the coding process and results to ensure that the coders accurately represented the data. Researchers compared disagreements and calculated coder reliability percent agreements. Each question was coded above 80% coder reliability for an average of 87.3%. Finally, pre and post responses were organized by theme into a table and researchers independently noted when a change in perception occurred from pre to post-test.

## RESULTS:

The pre-intervention survey was sent to 466 El Ed students and 105 responded. Due to incomplete responses, only 89 responses were useable for an initial response rate of 19.1%. All 89 pre-test participants received the post-test, 70 responded, two were incomplete, for a response/retention rate of 76.4%. All participants (n = 68) were El Ed students at [blinded for review]. The majority of participants were white (94.1%, n = 64), female (97%, n = 66), and aged 18–24 (93%, n = 63) which is common amongst the population surveyed (Feistritzer et al., 2011). Roughly half of the participants were in the pre-practicum (55.9%, n=38) phase of their program, married (52.9%, n=36), and had a household income of less than \$10,000 per year (54.4%, n=37). Were more demographic questions included than these? Since we do not have an example survey to view, would include results from all demographic questions here.

### Themes

Results from participant's open-ended responses were qualitatively analyzed and coded into three themes: (1) knowledge and readiness (2) logistics, and (3) social implications.

#### ***Knowledge and Readiness***

When discussing their knowledge of and readiness to implement BIC, some participants indicated a limited knowledge of BIC and unwillingness to implement it, while some felt capable and ready to embrace it. One participant said, "This is a topic that I have not thought about yet nor have I been taught about it...as a teacher I need to learn more about it before I can really implement it into my future classroom (part.47)." Participants expressed a lack of knowledge because they were unfamiliar with the program. However, many were still willing to learn about facilitating the program. For example, one participant said: "...I don't feel I truly understand what it [BIC] is, so I would need a lot more information before I could support the program. That being said, I'm not unsupportive of it now; just unaware (part.22)." In a previous study by Folta et al. (2016) staff were asked about their perceptions of BIC and found that despite initial hesitancy to implement BIC, staff felt it was a positive experience (Folta et al., 2016). Our study supports these findings by showing that many El Ed students expressed a desire to implement BIC if given training.

Although participants were apprehensive to embrace BIC initially; the educational video helped them feel more prepared. Some of the participants said: "I feel more confident after having watched the video (part. 30), "After viewing the video I see the value in it [BIC] (part. 24) and "I feel like I could do it in my classroom after watching the video!" (part. 61). This is not surprising because previous research has shown that educational videos are effective tools at educating participants' (Bentivegna et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020; Conceição et al., 2017; Klupt et al., 2020). These findings are promising and indicate an ability to improve perceptions of and confidence in implementing BIC.

#### ***Logistics***

Concern regarding logistics of implementing BIC was frequently noted by El Ed students. Responses revealed concerns about the mess, distraction, time it takes away from learning, and administration of BIC. In a previous study, Kruger et al. (2018) similarly found that teachers felt clean up, time to serve breakfast, and food waste were the greatest challenges to BIC. Additionally, Fornaro et al. (2022) reported that principals and kitchen staff believed mess, pests, work for staff, and decrease in learning time were barriers to BIC (Fornaro et al., 2022).

Funding was another common logistical concern discussed. Some expressed confusion regarding who was paying for the meals and a lack of funding for school breakfast programs. One participant said, "Schools don't get enough funding and who will make it and serve the food, and who will pay for the food (part. 52)" Comments also included being anxious

about how to incorporate feeding students' breakfast into their daily schedule. For example, one participant said: "I would be worried about it taking up a large part of our morning when there is already so much to do...and teach." Participants also felt unsure of the nutritional quality of the meals and this contributed to the low participation rates. This is consistent with results by Stokes et al. (2019) which also found that teachers often had a negative view of the nutritional content of school breakfast. Stokes et al., (2019). I'm not sure this citation really explains and is connected to your above findings. Teachers having a negative view of school food is different than children having a negative view. I would focus more on the positive changes post your intervention. Teachers felt apprehensive before, but post the intervention felt confident in their ability to provide BIC and handle the stress that might come with it. Despite these concerns, after watching the video several comments suggested that EI Ed majors felt with time, they could manage BIC. One participant said in the post-survey, "I might be concerned about the extra time that it takes. However, I believe that with practice and trial and error, we would be able to overcome this obstacle (part. 40)." In another qualitative survey, Stokes et al. (2019) also found that teachers worried about breakfast interfering with instruction time. However, McKeon et al. (2021) found that the majority of teachers believed BIC should continue to be used in their school and was worth the effort. Overall, these findings suggest that the educational video intervention was effective at improving teacher's confidence in implementing BIC. Prior to the video many participants were apprehensive but after the intervention felt confident that they could both implement BIC and handle the stress that comes along with that.

### ***Social Implications of Breakfast in the Classroom***

Another common concern of participants was the social implications of BIC. Responses revealed that EI Ed students were unsure if children would be teased or scrutinized for participating in school breakfast. Social stigma was a repeated answer to the question why school breakfast participation was so low in [blinded for review]. Specifically, participants felt that SBP participation was low due to parents' desire to provide for their children. For instance, one EI Ed students said: "I also worry about it labeling children as "poor" and for them to possibly be made fun of by other kids...I wouldn't want any of my students to feel like they're different or excluded in any negative way. (part. 41)" Decreased school breakfast participation because of social stigma has also been noted in several other qualitative studies (Bailey-Davis et al., 2013; Sabol et al., 2011). Our findings highlighted that EI Ed students believed that SBP participation was low because of the social stigma and parents not knowing about the program. Interestingly, the video intervention was not as effective at alleviating concerns related to social implications of BIC. Participants often had the same or different concerns related to social implications of BIC in the post survey.

**Table 1.** Illustrative quotes from pre and post-test participant responses for each of the three overarching themes

**Theme 1: Knowledge and Readiness**

Pre-Test Responses	Post-Test Responses	Perception Change
"Low. I don't feel I truly understand what it is, so I would need a lot more information before I could support the program. That being said, I'm not unsupportive of it now - just unaware." (Participant 22)	"I definitely feel like I know more about how it works and feel more confident in its value. The video helped me understand that. It would be easy to lend support to the program, but I still feel unsure about how to enact my role as the teacher in the program (i.e. specifics of what I would do)" (Participant 22)	Positive
"I would need more information on it. I am not really familiar with the School Breakfast Program at all." (Participant 37)	"If this program is helpful to students, then I'd be willing to adjust lesson plans to provide time to eat breakfast." (Participant 37)	Positive
"Not prepared because I do not know much about it." (Participant 38)	I feel that I am prepared to participate in and support this program. (Participant 38)	Positive
"Not ready at all. Not really sure what it is or how to implement it." (Participant 39)	"Not ready - not sure how it would work in reality." (Participant 39)	No change
"I don't feel very ready, mostly because I don't know a lot about and what kind of students need it. I'd also like to know the benefits of it." (Participant 41)	"I'd still like to know more, but I think it could be a good thing to implement, especially because it can help students focus more and have a better learning experience. If it were brought up in a meeting or something, I'd support it." (Participant 41)	Positive
"I think it's really important for students to get breakfast. I'd be happy to support Breakfast in the Classroom." (Participant 63)	"I think the most important thing is my attitude. When I view it as an asset to my students and my class as a whole, it's no problem to start the day with breakfast." (Participant 63)	No change

**Theme 2: Logistics**

Pre-Test Responses	Post-Test Responses	Perception Change
<p>"Time seems short already; does breakfast in the classroom happen simultaneously with classwork or in addition to it? Clean-up seems like a concern, but only concerns me a little bit." (Participant 26)</p>	<p>"General management might be tricky, but as soon as it became routine, I don't think that would be an issue at all!" (Participant 26)</p>	Positive
<p>"Cost, nutritional value (e.g. I don't think cereal by itself is a sufficient breakfast), time to set up and clean-up" (Participant 37)</p>	<p>"I would definitely want to know the nutritional content of the BIC food being served in my particular school." (Participant 37)</p> <p>"My biggest concern would be time. The school would have to ease some pressure on cramming material down kids' throats so they can eat and enjoy their breakfast." (Participant 37)</p>	No change
<p>"Some concerns I would have is who is paying for the breakfast? What foods are being served, are they nutritional but also appealing to children? Where will the food waste go (the classroom garbage's could fill up quickly)? What time frame will this be occurring in (before school or at the beginning of the school day)? What would be required of the classroom teacher?" (Participant 65)</p>	<p>"I think it would take training and procedures to establish getting, eating and discarding the food/wrappers during breakfast time, but I think that could be taught as well as any other procedure. Students are highly adaptable so with good management it shouldn't be too hard." (Participant 65)</p>	Positive

**Theme 3: Social Implications**

Pre-Test Responses	Post-Test Responses	Perception Change
"Maybe because it's hard for low-income families, due to having to work, or not having a car?" (Participant 29)	"I think that School Breakfast Participation may be low because of stigmas surrounding the breakfast program" (Participant 29)	Different concern
"The concerns I have are student participation" (Participant 53)	"I think perception has a lot to do with parents not wanting their children to eat breakfast at school. Some parents would like for others to think that they are capable of feeding their child, when in reality, they can't." (Participant 53)	Different concern
"It would need to be provided for all the students so that those who need it don't feel embarrassed," (Participant 60)	"I wouldn't want the few kids who are eating breakfast to feel awkward or embarrassed that they didn't eat breakfast at home though." (Participant 60)	Same concern
"Parents want to provide for their children without help." (Participant 67)	"People want to take care of their own family needs." (Participant 67)	Same concern

## **CONCLUSIONS & APPLICATIONS:**

The present study found that prospective teachers had little to no prior knowledge of alternate breakfast models. However, responses did show that despite a lack of knowledge, many student teachers believed that if BIC benefited their students, they would be open to implementing the program. School nutrition professionals should strive to educate future teachers on the benefits of school breakfast and alternative approaches to breakfast models. Educating EI Ed majors can potentially improve perceptions of BIC and therefore improve overall breakfast participation and consumption. For example, altering EI Ed curriculum to include basic information about school breakfast could improve receptiveness towards BIC later in their career.

Logistics were a major concern amongst participants when asked about implementing BIC. However, responses were generally more favorable towards BIC after viewing the educational video. Providing examples of how educators can successfully overcome common logistical barriers may help future teachers feel more capable to implement BIC. Helping school staff understand the benefits of BIC could also increase the number of positive experiences with BIC. Improving perceptions of BIC could enhance the likelihood of other schools transitioning to alternative breakfast programs, thereby potentially increasing the rate of low-income students participating in school breakfast. By understanding these barriers, school nutrition professionals can better overcome setbacks in implementing BIC. Strategies to help teachers decrease interruption to daily teaching could also be beneficial.

Lastly, this study confirmed that stigma surrounding traditional school breakfast is a concern of EI Ed majors and that in many cases the education video did not positively change that concern. Future interventions should focus on improving EI Ed majors concerns related to the social implications of BIC. School nutrition professionals can also inform lawmakers at federal and state levels to advocate for BIC as a way to decrease social stigma and hopefully improve schools' willingness to change breakfast models.

This study had limitations. The study involved a small sample of students from one private University. Therefore, results cannot be generalized to other populations; however, many results were consistent with findings from other studies and can be used to inform school nutrition professionals on stakeholders' perceptions. Additionally, due to the pilot study nature of this study a control group was not utilized. Future research should utilize a larger sample and a control group in order to better understand the perceptions of EI Ed majors regarding implementation of BIC.



## ABSTRACT

### PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively assess Elementary Education (El Ed) students' readiness to implement breakfast in the classroom (BIC) and identify whether an educational video could improve their perception of BIC as a model for breakfast delivery.

### METHODS

A pre-test, post-test intervention methodology was utilized for this study. A convenience sample of university students majoring in El Ed from one university were recruited to participate in the study. Participants completed the pre-test survey and were then asked to complete the post-test survey one week later. Just prior to taking the post-test survey, participants watched an educational video about the benefits of school breakfast programs and the logistics of BIC. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze open-ended questions from the pre and post-test surveys.

### RESULTS

Three themes emerged from the qualitative thematic analysis process (include type of analysis) and included 1) knowledge and readiness, 2) logistics, and 3) social implications. Initial responses showed an unfamiliarity with BIC. Participants varied in their willingness to implement BIC in their classrooms with some being apprehensive, while others were enthusiastic. Participants expressed several concerns about not knowing how BIC would logistically work and they believed social stigma prevented students from participating in school breakfast programs. Post-test responses revealed that the educational video was effective in educating participants about alternative breakfast programs. Post-test responses were generally more favorable towards accepting BIC after viewing the educational video in the post-test responses.

### APPLICATIONS TO CHILD NUTRITION PROFESSIONALS

Suggestions to improve receptiveness of alternative breakfast programs include educating El Ed students and student teachers on the benefits of school breakfast and BIC prior to their career. The use of an educational video has the potential to improve perception of BIC amongst school teachers. El Ed programs should consider including curriculum related to the logistics and benefits of school breakfast models.

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