

# The Effects of Food Insecurity on Primary Education

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## The Problem

Food insecurity is seen as the “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways” (Dave et. al., 2010). Food insecurity plays a major role in mental health issues, physical health problems, and reduced educational growth. A lack of nutritious food at a young age can hinder the ability to grow in an ideal way. Children who do not receive enough nutrients at a young age are more likely to struggle with mathematics and literature throughout their school years (Khan et. al., 2010).

Food insecurity affects all aspects of a child’s well-being. It is important to definitively state the major issues associated with food insecurity in order to better understand how teachers can help students, and how students can be supported to allow them to better succeed. Khan et. al. (2010) and Alaimo, Olson, Frongillo, and Briefel (2001), depict the idea that academically students who are food insecure are more likely to repeat a grade, have lower scores in mathematics, more often have seen a psychologist, and have difficulties making and keeping friendships. Khan et. al (2010) and Alaimo, Olson, Frongillo, and Briefel (2001) also state that mentally, food insecurity plays a huge role in depressive disorders and suicidal ideations in adolescents.

## Results

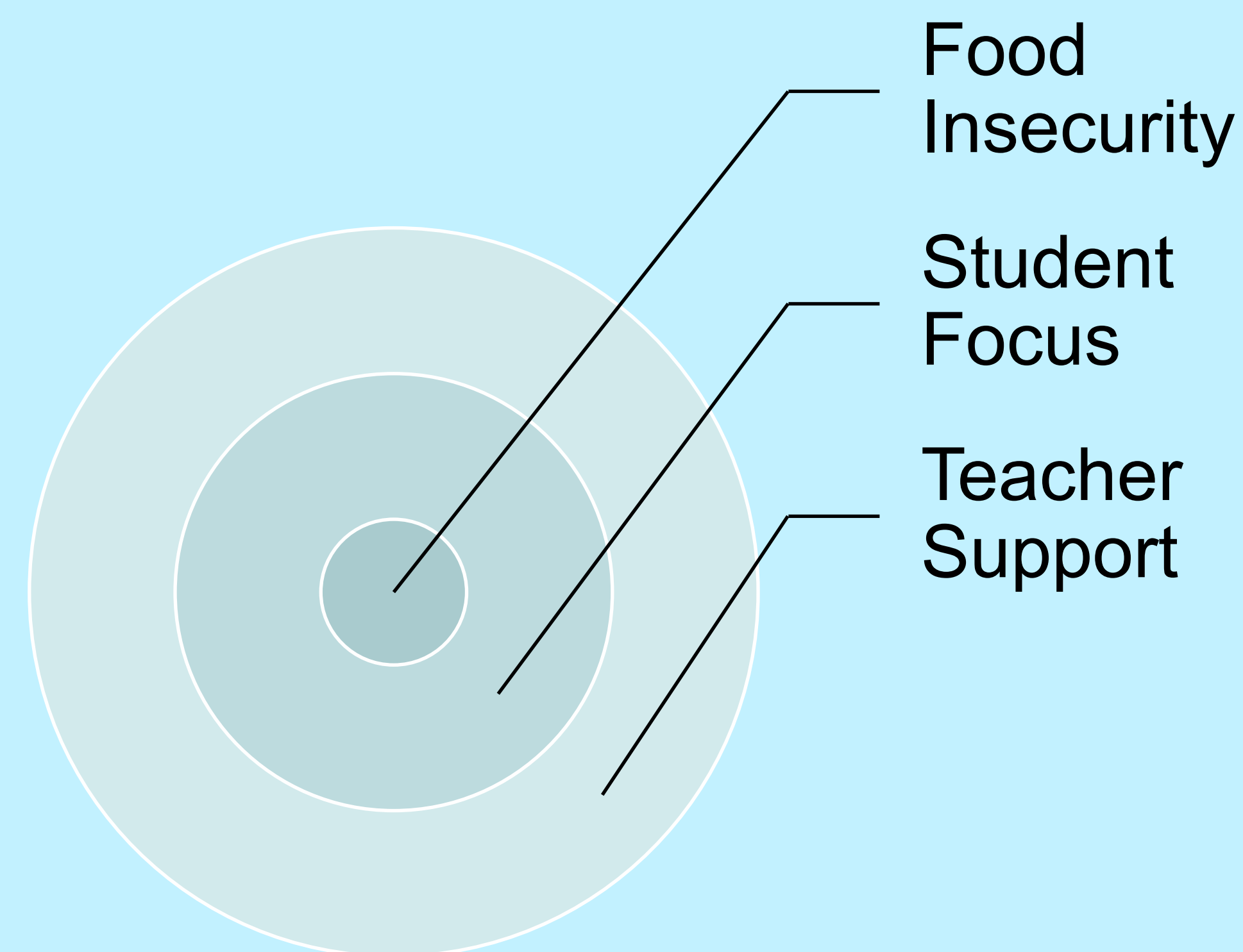
Based on preliminary analysis of the data, the following information has been uncovered:

- Children struggling with food insecurity often have difficulties focusing during class for extended periods of time.
- Children struggling with food insecurity often have difficulties staying awake, and report having a lack of energy.
- Teachers of students struggling with food insecurity have found that assisting students in taking advantage of school meal programs and keeping snacks on hand is helpful.
- Maintaining positive relationships with the families of food insecure students is important to support the student’s success.
- Families may need assistance in completing necessary paperwork to receive free meal services.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to uncover teacher perceptions and experiences with support for students who are experiencing food insecurities, as well as to uncover teacher perceptions to learn more about how food insecurity impacts student participation. The objective of this study was to collect data to determine the ways in which teachers combat the issues of food insecurity in the classroom.

This research allows for teachers to provide additional supports to these students through keeping snacks on hand when necessary or speaking with school administrators to see how to best support students who are food insecure. This study was designed to answer the questions as follows: 1) How does food insecurity effect student participation within the classroom?; and 2) How can teachers and schools support students who are struggling with food insecurity? This study hoped to provide more information about students in elementary grades, as much of the research has been in college-aged students.



## Methodology

This research study consisted of a qualitative and non-experimental approach. The data were gathered through surveys and recorded on an Excel Spreadsheet to keep all data organized and easily ready for analysis.

Teachers received an electronic Consent Form through Google Forms. Once the Consent Form was received, participants were coded in numbers and entered in the Excel Spreadsheet to represent the participating teachers. Participants were protected and confidentiality was maintained. The participant must have the Consent Form received by the researcher in order to begin the research process.

For three weeks, teachers completed surveys consisting of 18 multiple choice and short answer questions regarding student focus, teacher intervention, and food insecurity levels. Questions delved deeper into student participation during food insecurity, as well as teacher supports. The responses to these questions were analyzed for commonalities and coded. Teachers were instructed to fill out the survey and were instructed to answer the questions honestly. All teachers were Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> Grade teachers.

## Implications

When supporting students struggling with food insecurity, results from this study will provide teachers with beneficial resources to implement.

Teachers can best assist these students through enrollment into free and reduced lunch programs, keeping snacks on hand, and gently reminding students to stay on task.

The research and results will better exemplify struggles that students battling food insecurity face, and how to best assist these students.