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Factors Influencing Food Choices among Undergraduates at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract

Food choices of undergraduates have become increasingly unhealthy which put them at risk of malnutrition. This study investigated factors influencing such food choices among undergraduates at the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised all undergraduates registered for 2018/2019 academic session at the university. The descriptive research design of survey type was adopted for quantitative data and focus group discussion (FGD) was used for qualitative data. Four hundred and seventy-three (473) respondents were selected for the study with the use of simple, proportionate and convenience sampling techniques. Fifteen respondents participated in the focus group discussion (FGD). Researchers' designed questionnaire that had been validated by four experts in the related field was used for the quantitative data. A test-retest method was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument and the result ofO.SOr was obtained. Inferential statistics of Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to analyse the result of data collected, The three null hypotheses set for the study rejected at 0.05 alpha level of significance. This implies that there was a significant relationship in factors such as biological, economic, social and food choice among undergraduates at the University of Ilorin. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the university authority should organize enlightenment programme to educate students on the value of selecting the right food for consumption to improve students'health as well as cognitive capacity.

Introduction

Food is described as an edible substance consumed to nourish the body. It supplies the nutrients required to form and maintain body tissues. Food quality is affected by so many factors, which include the processing methods, storage and level of exposure to environmental contaminants. (Fredrick, Olukunmi & Akintayo, 2014). Food is a nutritive material which'when taken furnishes the body with heat and energy, regulate's body function s, promotes body growth, repairs body tissue and also assist in the regulation of body processes (Meg, 2016).

Meg (2016) explained that nutrition is the process by which living organisms receive and make use of certain substances that are necessary to its life and good health. Nutrition is important to good health because we depend upon the nutrients in the food for developing and repairing body tissues and other substances and as regulates of vital body processes.

Oyerinde (2010) explained that in most developing countries of the world, the plight of the common man is pathetic. The problem of feeding adequately and properly is the bane to health. Because of poverty, ignorance and carelessness, a lot of life is lost to nutritional diseases. This feeding is acceptable to the extent that even when the local have access to natural foods and fresh items, his methods of handling, preparation and feeding is often faulty, unhygienic and inconsistent with dietary and health laws. The outcomes of this situation are the prevalence of malnutrition, vitamin deficiency diseases, mineral deficiency diseases and protein-energy malnutrition. UNICEF Unite for children (2016) explained that children from the poorest households are more likely to be stunted than children from wealthiest households.

Most people are influenced to eat the foods their friends are eating. For most people, it is easy to find what to eat, especially the unhealthy option. As the old adage goes, you're what you eat. this can be very true when it involves the food choices people make, which are influenced by a large sort of internal and external factors which will even have little to try and do with the food itself. Consciously or unconsciously, individuals choose particular foods over others. Even though we are learning more than ever about nutrition and how it can affect our health, knowledge alone is not the only drive behind our food choices. We know that food choices can vary each day depending on changes in our daily routine and other factors such as poverty, nutritional knowledge, culture, taste, sleep pattern and many other factors can affect our choice for food (Oyerinde, 2010).

The link between nutrition and learning is well documented. Healthy eating patterns are essential for students to attain their full academics potential, full physical and mental growth and lifelong health and well-being. Healthy eating is demonstrably linked to reduced risk for mortality and development of the many chronic diseases as adults. Famuyiwa (2018); Jalliffa and Jalliffa (1989) explained that it is no gainsaying that food is essential in the existence of any living creature man inclusive. It serves as the fuel needed by the body to meet up its daily tasks of which its limited supply could affect the body adversely. Food is generally taken into the body through the alimentary canal. Apart from serving the physiological functions of growth, repairing and replacing old or

worn-out tissues, produce heat and energy for the work the body does, regulates body functions and keep them in good working order, food serves a social and aesthetic function. In all formal and informal gathering ceremonies inclusive, food constitutes an important item on the order of events. It gives opportunity to meet and talk with people one is either meeting for the first time or old friends. The atmosphere, type of dishes and cutlery with which food is served constitute its aesthetic value. This is why people buy expensive food-eating wares or get their dining rooms expensively decorated. From time immemorial, no nation has ever survived without an adequate supply of food for her populace which is an indication that food is the propelling force of any nation on the planet earth.

According to Famuyiwa (2018); Modi and Lindsey (2005), the poorer the people are the worse their diet and the more diet-related diseases they suffer from which in turn negatively affect the health of a Nation. Inadequate or lack of food has been a risk factor for major killer diseases in sub-Saharan African Nigeria inclusive. Food is a basic human need without which no life can be sustained or become productive. It is worthy to state that the productivity of a Nation is largely measured base on the continuum of her health. Food encompasses a direct impact on our cognitive performance which is why a poor decision at launch could derail a whole afternoon.

The body needs the right and healthy combination of different foods and fruits in order to function properly and maintain good health. The diets must have a balanced proportion of the basic food sources like carbohydrate, protein and fat. A healthy balanced diet is a diet that comprises the three basic food types in the right proportions for optimum physical health. Although food provides the body with the basic elements that sustain life, generate energy, provide growth and maintain good health, if not properly prepared and handled (Walker, 2018). After the transition from secondary school to university, when independence increases, students are continuously challenged to form healthful food choices. France (2006) opined that the key driver for eating by university students is of course hunger but what they choose to eat is not determined solely by physiological or nutritional needs. Some of the other factors that influence food choice include: biological determinants such as hunger, appetite and taste; economic factors such as cost, income and availability; Physical determinants such as access, education, skills and time; social determinants such as culture, family, peers, and meal patterns; psychological determinants such as mood, stress and guilt; as well as those determined by attitudes, beliefs and knowledge about food.

Ogechi and Akagu (2011) explained that food habits and nutritional status of undergraduates are among the principal public health problems in large areas of the world. As young adults move to an independent living situation, there is a high risk for unhealthy eating habits, far from care of parents; most undergraduates may begin to develop unhealthy eating habits over a brief span of your time. Due to time constraint, some students may frequently neglect entire meals during the day, and a result late-night binge eating. Some dietary pattern which includes snacking (usually on energy-dense foods), meal skipping particularly breakfast, irregular and wide of fast foods appear quite common among adolescents. Some of these factors have been associated with overweight and obesity.

France (2006) asserted that there is no doubt that the cost of food is a primary determinant of food choice. Whether the cost is prohibitive depend majorly on a person's income and socio-economic status. Low-income groups have a greater tendency to consume unbalanced diets and in particular have low intakes of fruit and vegetables. However, access to more money doesn't automatically equate to a far better quality diet but the range of foods from which one can choose should increase. The result of the study conducted by Ogechi and Akagu (2011) on food habits and nutritional status of Nigerian undergraduates in two tertiary institutions in Abia state among 342 students used as respondents revealed that the amount of money spent in a week by the subject was low and could account for the reason why more than 50% reported that economic factor was the main factor that determined their food choice. Another factor to this low expenditure on food per week could be related to their parent's socioeconomic status as most of their parents were civil servants who may likely be in the low or middle-income class. Also, the family size of most of the respondents ranged 4-9 which could be a source of more financial burden to the parents. Parents had been reported to possess a high impact on adolescents' food choice.

Cultural influences lead to the difference in the habitual consumption of certain foods and in traditions such as the exclusion of meat and milk from the diet. Cultural influences are however amenable to change: when moving to a new country individuals often adopt particular food habits of the local culture (France, 2006). Gordo (2015) opined that the cultures and societies that people live in along with the type of contact that individuals have with one another influence food choices. The importance of beliefs and traditions have been observed by the media through everyday life. We are influenced to form certain food choices through the connectivity that we've with one another. Through this, we are influenced by people all round the world. The result of a qualitative study (focus group) conducted on 35 students by Tom, Peter, Use and Benedicte

(2014) among Belgian university students indicated that group or peer pressure was explained to be an influencing factor on individual food choices. "you can make your own sandwiches, but then you might be the only one in the group, so the next day chances are big you also buy a sandwich on campus".

Tom, Peter, Ilse and Benedicte (2014) opined that food product prices and individual budget influence student's food choices. The participants mentioned that when living in a student residence, one become more self-dependent which also implies that price and budget become more and more important. "When you reside in a residence hall, you've got to shop for your own food, so you automatically start to pay attention to product prices" Students take food that are less in price and this makes them to either prepare food by themselves or take food from restaurant.

France (2006) explained that taste is consistently reported as a major influence on food behaviour. In reality 'taste' is that the sum of all sensory stimulation that's produced by the ingestion of food. This includes not only taste perse but also smell, appearance and texture of food. This sensory appears are thought to influence, in particular, spontaneous food choice. From an early age, taste influences behaviour towards food. A liking for sweetness and a dislike for bitterness are considered innate human traits, present from birth. Taste preferences and food aversions develop through experiences and are influenced by our beliefs and expectations.

Molly (2019) opined that the income someone makes and the cost of food can limit what foods are actually available to them; they might not be able to afford products that are local, for instance, healthy food isn't available nearby, it's more likely that individuals will purchase processed foods, fast food or other cheaper options simply to end the hunger they feel without getting the nutrients the body actually needs.

Statement of the problem

Food is an important aspect of human living; it plays an important role in disease prevention. For example, diets rich in fibre may suppress appetite, improve blood lipid profile and help in weight management. Humans are at the risk of diseases if the wrong choice of food is made. When it comes to food people make different choices based on some factors, it turns out that most independent free thinkers are often influenced to eat the food their friends, family or favourite celebrities eat without considering the nutritional aspect. Several factors including culture, taste and environment may contribute to different food selections among individuals. The nature of food an individual

consumes significantly determines his/her state of health at any given time. Many students in Nigeria face a number of food-related concerns such as poor nutrition, obesity and hunger. Students encounter the problem as a result of food insecurity or limited access to food due to an absence of enough money or resources. The result of study conducted by Florence, Asbridge and Veugelers (2008) shows that there is a significant influence of nutrition on the students' thinking skills, behaviour and health. The study also revealed that diet high in saturated fat can negatively influence learning and memory. Nutritional deficiencies can affect the cognitive development of students negatively while taking of good nutrition improves students' cognition, concentration and energy level. Good nutrition has been consistently proved to have a substantial impact on health and wellbeing. Some of the undergraduates of the University of Ilorin experience preventable illnesses as a result of their failure to take nutritious foods. The problem occurred due to their wrong steps in selecting the right food for consumption which consequently affect their health status as well as their level of academic achievement. Inabilities to select nutritious food by students contributing to increase in number of students visit the school clinic to complain about their health issues. However, research reports that poor diets and wrong choice of food and consumption can be linked to the occurrence of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis and anaemia (Oke, 2016; Lytle, Himes, Feldmen, Zive, Dwyer & Hoclscher, (2002). Life for university students is full of new experiences, including the students being liable for the nutritional values of their meals; with this newfound freedom of choice, selection of nutritious foods are not always the first choices for some undergraduate students in the study area. Factors responsible for food choice vary according to life stage and the power of one factor will vary from one individual or group of people to the next. Thus, one form of intervention to switch food choice behaviour won't suit all population groups. Rather, interventions got to be geared towards different groups of the population considerately to the various factors influencing their decisions on food choice. It is on this premises that the researchers investigated the factor influence food choice among undergraduates of the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. The factors that have caused undergraduates of the University of Ilorin to make choice of food even against their will time and to the detriment of their health and academic progress is an important issue that needs to be investigated with the aim to provide useful suggestions.

Research hypotheses

The research hypotheses formulated for the study were as follows:

1) There is no significant relationship between biological factor and food choices among undergraduates' in university of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

2) There is no significant relationship between economic factor and food choices among undergraduates' in university of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
3) There is no significant relationship between social factor and food choices among undergraduates' in university of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Research methodology

Design

The study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed design where both quantitative and qualitative data collected at the same time. The researchers used tested hypotheses for quantitative data. Qualitative data obtained from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) which was used to explain the direction of quantitative findings. Using sequential explanatory design was considered appropriate for the study to ensure that findings from quantitative data understood better with the use of qualitative.

Target population

The target population for the study comprises of all undergraduates that registered in 2018/2019 academic session in University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. This was based on the view that undergraduates being influence various factors in making their food selection daily and this will make them choose responses best influence their food choices. Researchers also targeted responses obtained from students' executive of selected faculties that participated in the focus group discussion because they are the student's representative and they serve as the link between the students and school administrators; they will be able to list factors or reasons which responsible for food choices among their colleagues.

Sample and sampling procedures

Simple random sampling technique was used to select five faculties out of fifteen faculties existing in the study area. Simple random sampling was used to avoid selection bias and to give equal opportunity for all existing faculties for being selected. Proportionate sampling technique was used to select the number of respondents participated in the study based on their population. Proportionate sampling technique was used to justify the number of respondents appropriate to select from each faculty based on students population registered in 2018/2019 academic session. The convenience sampling procedure was used to select respondents participated in the study, questionnaire was administered on the students based on the number selected from each faculty during faculty lecture theatres. The sampling procedure was used to give equal opportunity for students from different department of being

selected as respondents. Four hundred and seventy-three undergraduates' participated in the study using a descriptive research design of survey type. Purposive sampling technique was used to select three students executive from each of the selected faculty and fifteen respondents participated in Focus Group Discussion (FGD) which was qualitative in nature.

Research instrument and methods of data collection

Quantitative data was collected through questionnaires which were administered on four hundred and seventy-three (473) undergraduates' students in the study area. The reason for using questionnaire was to capture the views of undergraduates using a closed-ended questionnaire which could be used to carry out statistical hypotheses test formulated for the study. Qualitative data were obtained from the views of students executives of selected faculties which partake in focus group discussion.

Ethical consideration

Consent was sought from the research participants before administered questionnaires and carrying out the focus group discussion. The purposes of the study were explained to the respondents and participation was voluntary. The respondents participated in the study was also informed that the information provided will be used mainly for research purpose.

Limitation of the study

The major limitation was that all efforts of researchers to obtain the views of University of Ilorin Eatery regulatory board members on factor influence food choice among undergraduates in the study area proof abortive. As a result, the students' executives' members of the selected faculties were used as participants for Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

Results and discussion of findings

The results obtained from the three hypotheses used for the study were shown on the tables below:

Ho$_1$: *There is no significant relationship between biological factor and food choice among undergraduates of university of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria*

Table 1

Pearson "r" showing relationship between biological factor and food choice among undergraduates of university of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Variables	No	Mean	S t d	df	Calc. r-value	Critical r-value	Decision
Biological factor	473	15.155	3.665	471	0.582	0.195	Ho_1 rejected
Food choice among undergraduates	473	17.146	3.058				

Pc 0.05

Table 1 show that the calculated r-value is 0.582 and the critical r-value is 0.195 with 471 degree of freedom at 0.05 alpha levels. Since the calculated r-value is greater than critical r-value, the hypothesis one rejected and alternative hypothesis accepted, that is, there is a significant relationship between the biological factor and food choice among undergraduates of University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. The result of the finding carved around the fact that most of the undergraduates in the study area love to take sweetened foods and they show hostile to bitter foods, that was why majority of undergraduates in the study area prefer to take snacks while in school than take wholesome meal. The result of the finding confirmed with the submission of France (2006) who explained that taste is consistently reported as a major influence on food behaviour. In reality 'taste' is that the sum of all sensory stimulation that's produced by the ingestion of food. This includes not only taste perse but also smell, appearance and texture of food. This sensory appears are thought to influence, in particular, spontaneous food choice. From an early age, taste influences behaviour towards food. A liking for sweetness and a dislike for bitterness are considered innate human traits, present from birth. Taste preferences and food aversions develop through experiences and are influenced by our beliefs and expectations.

Ho_2: *There is no significant relationship between economic factor and food choice among undergraduates of university of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria*

Table 2

Pearson "r" showing relationship between economic factor and food choice among undergraduates of university of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Variables	No	Mean	S t d	Df	Calc. r-value	Critical r-value	Decision
Economic factor	473	20.870	3.536	471	0.781	0.195	Ho_2 rejected
Food choice among Undergraduates	473	17.146	3.059				

P< 0.05

Result on Table 2 shows that the calculated r-value is 0.781 and the critical r-value is 0.195 with 471 degrees of freedom at 0.05 alpha level. Since the calculated r-value is greater than the critical r-value, hypothesis two rejected and alternative hypothesis upheld that, there is a significant relationship between the economic factor and food choice among undergraduates in the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. The finding could be attributed to the fact that most of the respondents participated in the study come from families with poor economic status which influence them to choose foods that their money can afford. This is substantiated by findings of result conducted by Ogechi and Akagu (2011) on food habits and nutritional status of Nigerian undergraduates in two tertiary institutions in Abia state among 342 students used as respondents which established that the amount of money spent in a week by the subject was low and could account for the reason why more than 50% reported that economic factor was the main factor that determined their food choice. Another factor to this low expenditure on food per week could be related to their parent's socioeconomic status as most of their parents were civil servants who may likely be in the low or middle-income class. Also, the family size of most of the respondents ranged 4 – 9 which could be a source of more financial burden to the parents. Parents had been reported to possess a high impact on adolescents' food choice. Also, the finding of the study corroborate with the view of France (2006) who asserted that there is no doubt that the cost of food is a primary determinant of food choice. Whether the cost is prohibitive depend majorly on a

person's income and socio-economic status. Low-income groups have a greater tendency to consume unbalanced diets and in particular, have low intakes of fruit and vegetables. However, access to more money doesn't automatically equate to a far better quality diet but the range of foods from which one can choose should increase. The outcome of this finding agrees with the submission of Tom, Peter, Ilse and Benedicte (2014) opined that food product prices and individual budget influence student's food choices. The participants mentioned that when living in a student residence, one become more self-dependent which also implies that price and budget become more and more important. As one student expressed, "When you reside in a residence hall, you've got to shop for your own food, so you automatically start to pay attention to product prices". Students buy food that is cheaper and would rather prepare food by themselves or buy food from restaurants.

***Ho$_3$**: There is no significant relationship between social factor and food choice among undergraduates of university of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria*

Table 3

Pearson "r" showing relationship between social factor and food choice among undergraduates of university of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Variables	No	Mean	S t d	d f	Calc. r-value	Critical r-value	Decision
Social factor	473	14.685	4.525	471	0.424	0.195	Ho$_3$ rejected
Food choice among students	473	17.146	3.059				

P< 0.05

Result of Table 3 shows that the calculated r-value is 0.424 and the critical r-value is 0.195 with 471 degrees of freedom at alpha level of 0.05. Since the calculated r-value is greater than the critical r-value, hypothesis three was rejected and alternative hypothesis accepted that there is a significant relationship between the social factor and food choice among Undergraduates

in University of Ilorin, Ilorin Nigeria. The result of qualitative study (focus group) conducted on 35 students by Tom, Peter, Ilse and Benedicte (2014) among Belgian university students indicated that group or peer pressure was explained to be an influencing factor on individual food choices. "you can make your own sandwiches, but then you might be the only one in the group, so the next day chances are big you also buy a sandwich on campus". Also, Gordo (2015) opined that the cultures and societies that people live in along with the type of contact that individuals have with one another influence food choices. The importance of beliefs and traditions have been observed by the media through everyday life. We are influenced to form certain food choices through the connectivity that we've with one another. Through this, we are influenced by people all round the world. The result obtained from Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted on students executives of the selected faculties indicated that food prices, food taste, culture and influence of peers mentioned frequently and extensively when they talked about the factor influence food choice among undergraduates in the study area. The major reason for using focus group discussion was that it provides greater depth of response and therefore, greater consequent understanding than can be acquired through quantitative technique.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was found that; first, biological factor influence food choice among undergraduates in the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. Secondly, the economic factor influences food choice among Undergraduates in University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. Thirdly, social factor influence food choice among undergraduates in the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Recommendations

From the above conclusions, the researchers recommend:

- The University authority should organize enlightenment programme that will educate students on the value of selecting the right food for consumption which their body needs for improving their health as well as their cognitive capacity.
- Federal government, State government, local government as well as proprietor of private companies should commence the payment of approved thirty thousand naira new minimum wages for workers in Nigeria in order to enable parents increase the allowances provided for their children.

The University authority should include nutrition education into the school curriculum to correct erroneous introduction on diet students gathered from their homes due to culture.

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