

IMPROVING EATING HABITS OF STANDARD SEVENTH STUDENTS

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Abstract:

The study focused on standard seventh-grade students, recognizing the direct influence of their food preferences on eating behaviors, overall health, and the potential for obesity. The primary objective was to enhance the eating habits of 40 students within this grade and raise awareness about the detrimental effects of consuming junk food.

The research methodology commenced with a pre-test using a tailored questionnaire. Subsequently, an action program was implemented utilizing various engaging activities such as the CAM technique, constructing a food pyramid, staging a skit comparing healthy food to junk food, presenting food-related riddles, word search puzzles, and educational videos highlighting the adverse impacts of junk food consumption.

Following the implementation, a post-test using the same questionnaire was conducted to assess the program's impact. Comprehensive analysis of each questionnaire item was performed using basic data analysis tools available in Microsoft Office Suite 2013, specifically Excel. Additionally, daily observations of the contents of students' lunch boxes were recorded.

The study's outcomes revealed a notable enhancement in the students' eating habits after the program implementation. The changes were evident in both the post-test results and the observed contents of their lunch boxes.

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Rationale/ Background: Food plays a pivotal role in sustaining human life. A balanced diet serves as a cornerstone for optimal health and well-being, supplying our bodies with the necessary energy, proteins, essential fats, vitamins, and minerals required for growth and proper functionality. A diverse range of foods is essential to ensure the right balance of nutrients for overall good health. Conversely, poor eating habits can significantly impact human health.

Among various contributing factors to diseases, one significant element is an individual's eating habits. Modern diets often include what is commonly termed as 'Junk food'—a label for food items that offer empty calories. These are high in calories but lacking in essential micronutrients like carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and fiber. This classification of food, deemed unhealthy due to its poor nutritional content, is commonly known as junk food. Such food items are often recognized for their low or negligible nutritional value and may contain ingredients considered unhealthy when consumed regularly. Modern diets tend to enhance the appeal of these foods by incorporating additives, colors, and preservatives to improve taste, texture, and prolong

shelf life.

Poor eating habits encompass a range of behaviors, including inadequate or excessive consumption, insufficient intake of essential healthy foods, and the overconsumption of low-fiber or high-fat, salt, and sugar-laden foods and beverages. In the short term, inadequate nutrition can lead to stress, fatigue, and reduced productivity, while over time, it significantly elevates the risk of developing illnesses and various health complications.

Unhealthy eating habits often revolve around processed foods, fast food, items high in added sugars, and similar options. Consistent consumption of these foods can have detrimental effects on the body's overall health.

Objectives:

1. To raise awareness among students regarding their detrimental eating patterns.
2. To assist students in distinguishing between nutritious and harmful food choices.
3. To educate students about the adverse impacts associated with consuming junk food.
4. To foster an understanding among students regarding the significance of adopting healthy eating practices.
5. To enhance and cultivate healthier dietary habits among the student body.

Problem Statement: Improving Eating Habits of Standard Seventh Students

Plan of Action: Many activities were planned and conducted to make the students aware about their unhealthy eating habits and to make them realize about the importance of healthy eating habits and thus improve their eating habits. Action programme conducted with the help of activities was as follows:

Activity 1: CAM Technique To introduce the concept of healthy foods, the CAM technique was employed. The initial session involved presenting students with positive and negative food examples. Positive examples included Salad, Rice, Fruit Juice, Nuts, Milk, Vegetables, and Pulses, while negative examples comprised Chips, Cakes, Cold drinks, Pastries, Ice-cream, Pizza, and Burgers. Students were tasked with identifying essential attributes without directly naming the concept. Unlabeled examples like Popcorn, Coca-cola, Spinach, Samosa, Beet-root, and apple were presented for students to identify positive and negative attributes. Following this, students shared their own examples, leading to a collective definition of healthy food. This activity aimed to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy foods while enhancing awareness of nutritional content.

Activity 2: Constructing Food Pyramid The objective of this activity was to illustrate a "Balanced diet" through a Food Pyramid building exercise. Preparation involved creating a food pyramid chart and printing images of various food items. On the activity day, selected students constructed the food pyramid based on given criteria. This exercise facilitated an understanding of different food categories, depicting daily food intake aligned with the food pyramid.

Activity 3: Skit on Healthy vs. Junk Food Preparation commenced two days ahead, with students receiving scripts for a skit focused on 'Healthy vs. Junk food.' On the scheduled day, students performed the skit, followed by discussion on observed themes and subsequent exploration of diseases associated with junk food consumption. This activity aimed to raise awareness of the consequences linked to consuming unhealthy food.

Activity 4: Food Guessing Riddle Activity Riddles centered on healthy foods were prepared in advance. During the session, students were divided into three groups and tasked with solving riddles related to healthy foods.

Activity 5: Videos and Word Search Puzzles Pre-selected videos showcasing the adverse effects of junk food were gathered online. On the activity day, students viewed these videos before engaging in a word search puzzle themed around 'Healthy Eating.' This activity aimed to reinforce knowledge about the consequences of consuming junk food and to promote engagement with healthy eating concepts.

Time/Schedule: Over a 15-day period, an action research project was undertaken. Observations of Class VII students' eating habits were meticulously recorded during break times over two days. This involved noting whether students brought their own lunches and the contents, or if they purchased items from the canteen.

On the third day, a pre-test using a self-prepared questionnaire quantified the students' unhealthy eating habits. Following this, a 10-day action plan was initiated, incorporating various activities mentioned earlier along with regular monitoring of students' lunchboxes.

On the 14th day, a post-test was conducted to assess the impact of the action program on students' eating habits. Finally, on the last day, a follow-up was carried out by checking the contents of students' lunchboxes.

Sample: The sample of the study consisted of 40 students studying in Standard Seventh of Little Flower English High School, Mumbai Maharashtra,

Tools Used: Quantitative data were gathered using both a personal data sheet and a self-prepared questionnaire. Additionally, images were captured during observations of the students' lunchboxes.

Types of Analysis: In this study, the researcher employed two data analysis methods. Initially, a pre-test consisting of 15 questions was administered to the students via a questionnaire. Questions such as food preferences (Salad, Pizza, Burger), inclusion of fruits in their diet (Yes or No), and others were included. Following the action program, a post-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the activities on students' eating habits. The percentage scores from both the pre-test and post-test were used for analysis.

To compute the percentages, the researcher utilized data analysis tools within the Microsoft Office suite 2022, specifically Excel.

Qualitative data were collected and analyzed through daily observations of students' lunchboxes, including images of the food brought by standard seventh-grade students during break time. Additionally, daily homework assignments were given to the students during the action program, regularly checked, and records were maintained.

Interpretation: Quantitative analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores revealed a notable improvement in the eating habits of standard seventh-grade students following the action program. The students demonstrated an increased awareness of their diets, with a decrease in the percentage of unhealthy food consumption and a corresponding rise in the consumption of healthy foods.

Qualitative analysis conducted before the pre-test showed that students predominantly carried junk food in their lunchboxes. However, after implementing the intervention, positive changes were observed. Students began to pack more fruits and vegetables in their lunchboxes and showed a reduced inclination towards purchasing junk food from outside sources. This reflected an improvement in their overall eating habits.

Conclusion and Implications: Findings from the action research conducted revealed the following:

1. The pre-test questionnaire responses indicated prevalent unhealthy eating habits among the students. However, the post-test responses showcased significant improvements in their eating habits.
2. The observed enhancement in post-test performance is attributed to the activities implemented during the study aimed at improving the students' eating habits.
3. Despite the positive improvements, achieving a 100% outcome was not feasible due to the limited duration of the 15-day action program. Time constraints were a significant limitation.

To further enhance and refine the students' skills, the following strategies can be considered:

- a) Implementing extemporaneous activities to encourage expression of views and opinions while fostering the acquisition of valuable information related to healthy eating habits. This will encourage the incorporation of these habits into their daily routines.
- b) Implementing the "My Plate" activity, allowing students to plan their meals by selecting appropriate food items to meet their nutritional needs. Encouraging students to follow this practice in their daily routines will promote balanced eating habits.
- c) Providing students with links to interactive games centered around healthy eating habits. Engaging in these games will facilitate learning while making the adoption of good eating habits enjoyable.
- d) Organizing short educational excursions to places such as farms, food markets, supermarkets, or bakeries. Subsequent follow-up activities involving discussions, drawing sessions, and food tastings will reinforce positive eating habits among the students.
- e) Encouraging students to create and present posters showcasing healthy foods and beverages, fostering awareness and understanding of nutritious choices.

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