

An investigation into how the presentation of fruit influences a child's choice to a healthy snack.

Abstract

This research project was carried out in Swansea by a student from The University of Wales Trinity Saint David. The study will look at how fruit presentation affects a child's decision to have a nutritious snack. Six children, ages four to five, will be used in the study, and they will sample fruits twice. When the fruit is served to the children for the first time, it will be presented as usual, and observers will note and record them. When children taste the fruit for the second time, they'll be given coloured plates, and the fruit will be presenting a happy face with them. The children will be watched and recorded both times and the researcher will observe how the children respond, how much they are willing to eat, and which fruits they will or will not eat. The investigation of the study is to determine whether children's perception and willingness to eat fruit is determined by how it is presented to them. This research study will address how ethical issues are addressed and go into detail on how the researcher will employ methodological considerations to acquire the best findings.

Literature review

Khalid et al., (2016) states that research indicates that there is a direct link between children's diet and mental health. Jacka et al., (2011), says that limiting sugar-filled meals and beverages and eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains may help reduce the risk of mental health issues including anxiety and depression, allowing children to feel happier. Golley and Hendriel (2012) demonstrate that dairy products with reduced fat can help lower the risk of heart disease by regulating blood pressure and cholesterol. An excess of salt and saturated fats in someone's diet may be the cause of high blood pressure and cholesterol (Viggiano et al., 2023). According to Owushi and Asanga (2024), fresh fruit provides essential vitamins, minerals, fibre, and nutrients that are vital for the growth and development of children's health. According to NHS (2022), children should consume five or more servings a day. According to Grinwis (2023), this means that most of the child's plate should consist of colourful fruits and vegetables. According to Hau and Lange (2023), it is best to provide as much colour and nutrients as possible in each meal. According to Orrey (2016), children today are the adults of tomorrow; by influencing children's views about food and relationship with it, we can make sure they have this information when they grow up. Orrey (2016) also suggests that by involving children in food education, practitioners are equipping them with lifelong skills. Gray et al., (2017), suggests that the idea of Food for Life is to leave a legacy, and this legacy is that all children should have access to healthy food.

Graybiel and Smith (2014), states that it is difficult to break bad habits, but this also applies to excellent behaviours. Children are more likely to continue with positive habits when they see and feel them established by their parents/caregivers, particularly when it comes to eating (Whitebread and Bingham, 2013). According to Hart and Rollins (2011), one of the most important things to talk to children about is the power of excellent food and the necessity of helping them form healthy eating habits at a young age. According to the Department for Education (2022), the goal of the school lunch recommendations is to ensure children get the nutrition and energy they need to make the most of their school day while also assisting them in developing healthy eating habits. Mulkens and Jansen (2010) suggest that food presentation and taste should be prioritised, particularly in school settings where children want to take home beneficial messages.

Wadhera, Capaldi Phillips and Wilkie (2015) suggests that although a child's rejection of foods like vegetables is common, this rejection should not be tolerated or disregarded. Dudley, Cotton and Peralta (2015), implies that it is critical to assist children in the education process of healthy eating so they can incorporate these foods into their diet. The rise of appealing, but harmful, alternatives, many of which are aimed specifically at children has made this much more difficult to accomplish (McCarthy, Vries and Mackenbach, 2022). This is concerning since a childhood diet lacking in key nutrients has been linked to several major health issues, including cancer, heart disease, and type-2 diabetes (Gulati, 2010).

A significant percentage of children are overweight or obese, Beynon and Davies (2024) states that prior to the pandemic 2014–15 to 2018–19, there were 12.1% and 3.2% of children overall who were obese and severely obese, respectively. Obesity climbed to 15.5% and severe obesity increased to 4.8% in the post-pandemic year 2021–2022 (Beynon and Davies, 2024). Katoch, (2021), indicates that malnutrition in children can develop when poor food choices are made causing some children to be underweight. Too much or too little weight is linked to several serious adverse social, psychological, and health consequences (Puhl, Himmelstein and Pearl, 2020).

De Jans et al., (2021), implies that the way that nutritious meals are presented to children is crucial since children will evaluate their food based on a variety of factors, not only flavour. The way food appears, smells, and is referred to will all affect how children view eating (Cappellotto and Olsen, 2021). Ragelienė and Grønhøj (2020), discuss the importance of ensuring that children are consuming the food they need, it is crucial to consider how food is presented for them. Qiu and Hou (2020), discusses how the top 10 lists of children's favourite meals in the UK, include high-fat items like pizza, French fries, sweets, chocolate, and cakes. Bordewijk and Schifferstein (2020), suggests that this is the result of the foods' visually appealing presentation, which includes using vibrant, colourful packaging and cake and pizza decorations. A recent study by Ragelienė (2021), revealed that, in contrast to adults who prefer smaller pieces and fewer colours on a dish, a sample of children expressed a desire for the maximum number of elements and colours on a plate.

Torres, Gomes and Mattos (2021) explains neophobia, which is the physiological reaction to the dislike to change which can be shown when trying new foods. According to twin studies, neophobia is a highly heritable trait, and certain dietary choices are impacted by both the family environment and certain genetics (Wardle and Cooke, 2008). However, Maiz et al., (2021) interpret that in terms of supporting healthy eating in schools, practitioners should encourage children to choose their own healthy food choices, take them shopping whether that be pretend or realistic and go through the recipe. The current research will investigate the impact of presentation of fruit snacks on children and their choices about what to eat. The presentation will encourage the children to hopefully make better choices regarding their diet.

Methodological considerations

There are various ways to gather data for a wide range of topics, but it is crucial to select the approach that works best for the participants, the group size, and the researcher. This section of the research study will examine how the methodologies employed will support the investigation

and maximise its benefits. It will go over several approaches, their advantages, and some of their drawbacks.

The first method that will be used to investigate children's responses to food is observation and using video footage to record children during snack time at school within their classroom. The observation will focus on how a reception class (aged 4-5 years) react to different fruits and the presentation of the fruit. To prevent biasing their conduct, it is crucial that the pupils and teachers in the classroom are aware that they are being watched by a camera, but it is even more crucial that they are unaware of the specific goals of the research, or the behaviours being watched. There are six children in the sample. It will be easier to grasp the stages of development and how presentation might encourage a child to try the nutritious food in front of them if there is a focus on one age group. The children will be observed on two occasions where the presentation of their fruit snacks varies. The focus group of six will be randomly selected from the children who have consent to participate. The same group of children will be observed on both occasions. The group will consist of three girls and three boys.

While observing, researchers are gathering data by writing notes and recording short films. This approach, which calls for close observation and listening, is regarded as one of the most basic and oldest research approaches in qualitative research (Mukherji and Albon, 2023). Subjective methods are used in qualitative research to support theories and hypotheses. Gaining an understanding of the traits of qualitative research will assist the researcher in avoiding biases and preserving the integrity of their work (Mukherji and Albon, 2023). Seeing children in their native habitat allows researchers to get insight into their personalities. This type of study aids in the understanding of children's behaviour in various contexts and the influences of environmental factors on children's behaviour (Nolan, 2013). A successful approach for gathering information and gaining understanding of things that occur in the actual world is observational research.

Makewa, Ngussa and Kuboja (2019) discuss the use of video recording for observation study and states that it might have some practical and technological drawbacks, which is one of its key downsides. Appropriate equipment, which might be expensive, large, or unreliable, is needed for video recording. When people act differently because they are aware that they are being observed, it is known as the Hawthorne effect (Sedgwick and Greenwood, 2015). Greenwood (2004), also states that it can have an impact on a wide range of behaviours including eating habits. Using video observation to observe children eating may result in the children's behaviours and their perception of food to change and act up in front of the camera, which is seen especially in younger children (Saarni, 1984). However, the research will need to use the video recording so that it can support or challenge the observations made in real time. Seedhouse (2021), states that the recordings used for observations enable the researcher to re-visit the event and to check their observations helping to reduce potential bias.

Even while observation takes a great deal of time, it often produces the most accurate results when the researcher analyses it precisely. While conducting interviews may seem simpler, it may suffer from participants' potential for dishonest responses. Newby (2014), suggests that while observations might allow the researcher to take a step back and examine the associated topics,

interviews are mostly conducted with single people or small groups and are question related. Macnaughton, Rolfe and Iram Siraj-Blatchford (2010), implies that due to the early age of the children involved in this approach, the information gathered through leading questions and interviews may not be sufficient or dependable. The researcher may study the children's reactions, read their facial expressions and questions, and even listen in on any talks they may be having with teachers or friends that they are more comfortable with (Shimamura et al., 2019).

The second method is the use of a questionnaire, which will be given to parents/caregivers to fill out prior to the observation takes place. Parents/caregivers will be asked to provide both qualitative and quantitative information on their children using this method. Both multiple-choice and open-ended questions will be included in the questionnaire to provide the researcher with as much information as possible about each unique child. The questionnaire must be completed by the parents/caregivers of the children taking part in the observation, since it provides the researcher with background data on the children's age, height, and sex—information that is critical for a precise observation. It also lists any allergies or medical issues that the children could have that would exclude them from this study. This questionnaire will also ask the parents/caregivers about the children's eating habits at home and what kinds of food they like, whether this be healthy or unhealthy snacks. The focus of this method is to find out as much information about the children as possible which will benefit the reliability of the study.

One efficient strategy to get information quickly and efficiently from many respondents is by using questionnaires to gather data (Lambert, 2019). This will save time and effort. However, Bell (2005), insinuates that one drawback of questionnaires is that they often have limited response possibilities, which makes it difficult for respondents to adequately express complicated answers. Roberson and Sundstrom (1990), discusses how questionnaires could also have poor response rates, misunderstandings by those who responded, and insufficient explanation of questions. It is essential that the researcher creates questions that are precise and straightforward bettering the chance of parents/caregivers to respond.

Since many parents/caregivers have little children at home, it is essential that questionnaires be kept brief and easy to complete (Cox and Cox, 2008). This will make parents/caregivers feel more at ease and prevent them from taking too much time. In addition to paper questionnaires which are time consuming. Although paper questions do not require parents/caregivers to have access to technology and internet connection. Online questionnaires also require parents/caregivers to create passwords to protect their children's data, whereas paper copies of the questionnaires will be sent out with children and returned to the school. This ensures that security measures needed are minimized.

Children should be respected before they are asked to participate in research, throughout their involvement, and after it is over (Baumann and Bleisch, 2014). This includes when they are firstly approached for possible involvement and even if they decline. It is important to track their welfare and if they experience adverse reactions to have steps in place to ensure that appropriate comfort is available to them (Bluyssen, 2016). This may mean having an opportunity to leave the study and to respect the child's right to change their mind regarding

participation. At the end of the study, it is also important to inform the children of what has been learned (Dockett, Perry and Kearney, 2013). Storch and Whitehurst (2001), demonstrates how important it is to remember when researching on children we cannot fully understand them and their past experiences. It is important to have familiar faces like their friends and teachers around children especially when they are in a situation that is new, as this makes them feel comfortable and have their support network around if needed.

According to Heale and Forbes (2013), triangulation in research is the process of approaching a subject using several datasets, methodologies, theories, and/or investigators. This research method can help to improve the validity and dependability of the conclusions (Wilson, 2016). Triangulation also tries to use a variety of methodologies to study and describe complex human behaviour to provide readers a more thorough understanding. It is a procedure that may be used for both qualitative and quantitative research and enables data validation (Roberts-Holmes, 2018). Triangulation approaches are used in this study since the data will be gathered using three different methods: questionnaires, observation videos for reflection, and written observations. Using triangulation approaches can help to make sure the study is accurate and dependable, and that the researcher is extracting as much information as possible from it. It will ensure that the data collected gives the clearest picture of the impact of presentation on children's consumption of fruit at snack time in reception classrooms.

Ethical considerations

This section of the investigation will go over the many rules, regulations, and standards established by BERA and UWTSD to guarantee everyone's safety and well-being. It will address some of the moral issues that must be considered and the stringent rules that must be followed to guarantee that everyone concerned is treated with decency, respect, and safety.

Since the researcher is a University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) student, it is crucial that the researcher follows procedure when doing research because failing to do so may have a detrimental impact on the university's reputation. It's crucial to submit a UWTSD Ethics form (2024) and obtain university ethical permission before starting any study. According to

UWTSD (2024), researchers need to talk about the perspectives of all parties involved, provide information regarding confidentiality and anonymity, and talk about the steps used to secure parental and student consent. The Ethics form, which will be provided in the appendices, must always be specifically referred to by the researcher. When doing research on children, UWTSD has strong guidelines. One of these guidelines is that all researchers must have a valid disclosure and barring check. The researcher therefore has a current enhanced DBS certificate that is valid for both the university and the school where the research will take place. Ethical guidelines guarantee that each study will be beneficial, "do positive good," and free from malfeasance, which means no one participating will suffer bodily or psychological injury as a result. To fulfill this aspect, the participants will be able to give assent to their participation and be able to leave at any point. The study supervisor will be available to discuss any issues of concern with the parents/caregivers should this be needed. It also guarantees that each participant has finished relevant risk assessments and been evaluated by the university's safety authorities. A risk assessment will be undertaken prior to the study's start and will be based on the school's policies and shared with the university. Additionally, every researcher receives a debriefing so they may receive any additional help they may require later as per UWTSD guidelines. In this case this will be with the study supervisor.

Purcell, (2020), explains that Every Child Matters, extended services, and the Children's Plan are just a few of the past developments in policy that have put schools at the centre of an educational delivery system where important responsibilities need delegation of authority to individuals with the necessary skills. When conducting a case study, Tschannen-Moran (2001), states that it is crucial for a researcher to collaborate and interact with senior staff and supervisors to make sure that the government and school regulations are followed. Therefore, prior to starting this study the researcher will discuss it with the headteacher and the class teacher as well as the children. To make sure that ethical considerations are met, according to Harcourt, Perry, and Waller (2011), before allowing children to participate in research, it is crucial that they and their parents/caregivers are fully informed about the goals of the study. Lorell et al., (2015) refers to informed consent as being when participants are aware of the expectations placed on them, the advantages and disadvantages of participating, and the fact that participation is completely voluntary. In general, children who can give consent must also indicate their want to participate. Parents/caregivers must be given the information typically needed for informed consent so they may determine whether to let the child to participate. Bourke and Loveridge (2013), state that a child must either vocally express the willingness to participate or sign a simple assent form (usually, children over the age of nine years old must sign). To get permission for children to be videotaped and watched for research purposes, the researcher will be providing a digital consent form for parents/caregivers to complete. These will be stored electronically and will be password protected. The digital letter will explain the opt out option, which will involve the parents/caregivers not signing and returning the form if they would not like their child to participate. The students in the classroom will also be told of what is going to happen, and they will be required to indicate their agreement or disagreement by raising or lowering their thumbs. Children will be told that they may simply put their thumbs down or vocally indicate that they

would rather not participate in the activity if do not want to after it starts. The main objective of the study is to ensure the children's safety and welfare, and their right to engage in research that affects them must all be balanced in any study involving children (Deb, 2022).

Stafford et al., (2011) talks about the numerous laws in the UK that are designed to safeguard children's rights and ensure their safety, ensuring the security of children's personal information is mandated by one of these laws. Lievens and Verdoodt (2018), explain that it is essential that the researcher comply to the Data Protection Act of 2018 and maintain the confidentiality of all participants' personal information during this research project. The children's information on the questionnaire, the digital consent papers from the parents/caregivers, the video footage, and any written or typed notes the researcher may take during the observation are the things that need to be kept private and secure. Throughout the study, the researcher will store any sensitive information in a secure cabinet and record any video footage on a password-protected device that will be destroyed when the research study is over. The only people that will be able to access any secure information or devices with the footage on is the researcher and supervisor.

In addition to ensuring that ethical considerations are met on all research projects, the BERA (2024) guidelines also celebrate and acknowledge the diversity of approaches in educational research. The guidelines encourage respect for all parties involved, including participants, commissioning bodies, academics and professional practitioners, and readers and users of the research. The researcher will adhere to all UTWSD and BERA guidelines during this project, as well as senior school staff guidance and the guidance of a university supervisor for further support.

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