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Assignment component 2 (Written Report):

**EXPLORING THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EATING
BEHAVIOUR AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A
PUBLIC UNIVERSITY: A FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION.**

Table of Contents

Introduction/Literature Based Background to the Study	2
Aims and objectives	2
Research Question	3
Rationale.....	3
Research methodology (Research methods)	3
Research Design	3
Recruitment.....	4
Sampling	4
Study Participants	4
Materials/Data Collection Method(s)/procedure	5
Data analysis technique	5
Ethical considerations	6
Results	6
Findings of the interview	6
Discussion.....	12
Conclusion	14
Reference List.....	15

Introduction/Literature Based Background to the Study

Public university students, especially those who attend colleges and universities, usually experience a crucial time where unhealthful changes in eating habits deteriorate their mental and physical health (Lee et al., 2020). With the aid of an appropriate research design that includes a variety of ideas and suggestions, it will be possible to create effective and precisely catered interventions that can strengthen the dominant behaviours in the chosen group by understanding the various factors that influence public university students' eating habits (Omar et al., 2021). The prevention of many illnesses, primarily in the populations of young adults and adults, such as overweight and obesity, is a global problem. Students frequently find it challenging to adjust to any setting throughout the crucial era at universities and colleges, particularly right after leaving school (Begley et al., 2019). In these situations, the students struggle to adjust to their new eating habits due primarily to other outside factors like financial constraints, varying eating habits, social interactions, cultural norms, and peer pressure, all of which frequently affect the students' dietary choices.

Aims and objectives

Aim

The present study will use a focus group discussion approach to examine the major factors that influence eating habits among postgraduate students at a public institution.

Objectives

- To determine the predominant factors influencing eating habits among postgraduate students
- To research how socioeconomic variables affect the eating patterns and decisions of graduate students.
- To look at how the eating habits of graduate students are influenced by peers and the social environment.

Research Question

The research questions considered for the present study are as follows:

- What are the primary elements that significantly affect postgraduate students' eating habits, and how do these elements combine to affect their dietary practises?
- What effects do various socioeconomic factors—like wealth and educational attainment—have on the food choices and eating habits of graduate students?
- How do the dietary preferences and consumption behaviours of graduate students reflect their influences from peers and the greater social milieu?

Rationale

Several studies conducted showcased that students across the globe and mostly in the US and UK are subjected to consuming increasing amounts of high-calorie foods resulting in significant increases in overweight and obesity (Robertson et al., 2021). Carrying out this study will be effective in understanding how a wide range of factors influence eating behaviour of postgraduate students starting in a public university (University of Wales).

Research methodology (Research methods)

Research Design

Research design entails the overall framework of the matters n techniques undertaken by the researcher to successfully execute the study. The present study has considered a descriptive research design that involves a systematic collection of information that usually helps the researchers to describe a phenomenon, population, or even a situation (Newman and Gough, 2020). In the present study, the chosen population: postgrad students, studying in a public university will be efficiently described in elaborated while answering specific research questions identified before with the help of descriptive research design (Pandey and Pandey, 2021).

Recruitment

In terms of recruitment, the first communication and contact between the researchers and prospective participants who are institutional students studying in the public university have been conducted through online announcements (Mishra and Alok, 2022). However, in terms of the data collection process, face-to-face interactions are considered mandatory, which is a prelude to the informed consent process that will help the present study to be executed successfully.

Sampling

Sampling methods are important and are essentially the process of determining the accuracy of the research/results. With the help of a specific sampling technique, it can help the researcher to perform the data collection process with a more manageable and smaller amount of data to build and run analytical models on an entire population and generalise (Mukherjee, 2019). The idea is to quickly produce accurate findings from the statistical population. The present study has undertaken a convenient sampling method. Convenience sampling, a non-probability sample strategy, is used in the study on factors influencing eating habit among postgraduate students. This strategy was chosen because it is practical, easy to understand, and accessible, and because it enables researchers to collect data from easily accessible individuals inside the public institution (Mukherjee, 2019). Despite the convenience it offers, it can lead to selection bias, limiting the generalizability of findings to a larger postgraduate student community. Despite its drawbacks, convenient sampling provides a quick and economical way to gain a basic knowledge of the complex interplay of factors impacting eating habits in this specific context (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

Study Participants

The study participants considered for the present research are postgrad university students studying in public institutions. The present study has considered four participants consisting of Indian backgrounds with a few of them having cholesterol diagnoses, glaucoma and diabetes running in the family, from the postgrad department. They will be representing the entire population in that institution: the

University of Wales and will be involved in the focus group discussion to potentially conduct the data collection method (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

Materials/Data Collection Method(s)/procedure

The present study has undertaken a qualitative data collection method with the help of the focus group method. This is a type of group interview that involves a very small number of people whom this chosen participant will represent demographically (Säfsten and Gustavsson, 2020). Similar people are the participants who have common experiences and characteristics or traits. Using a focus group method is effective in the present study to collect opinions and feedback from a small number of people about the specific concept, which is different influential factors impacting the eating behaviour and dietary patterns among postgraduate students studying in public institutions (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

The selection of the questions is developed primarily open-ended and semi-structured. There are some close-ended questions as well. However, specific justification is also asked for each answer from the chosen group of population to ensure relevant data is acquired once the entire focus group process is conducted.

Data analysis technique

The present study has considered a qualitative data analysis technique that involves the specific procedure of organising, interpreting and analysing the non-American and highly text-based conceptual information and use of feedback. The primary intention of involving qualitative data is to identify specific patterns and themes, recording subjects and a wide range of repetitive aspects that can be considered as important variables from the data sets (Al-Ababneh, 2020). This can help research to identify the potential actions that can be taken to improve the overall eating behaviour and dietary choices made by postgraduate students studying in public institutions.

Ethical considerations

The researcher has also undertaken proper resource communication and ensured the potential for harm to maintain the ethical integrity of the research process. One of the most important articles Principles that have guided the research, designs and practices is the exclusive usage of the data for the academy purpose only and keeping all the data and information, secure and safe in a protective vault, only accessible to involved researchers and relevant individuals (Mukherjee, 2019).

Results

Findings of the interview

1: What influences your food choices?

Participant 1	<i>"I am health conscious and I have cholesterol issues. For this, I always consider healthy foods."</i>
Participant 2	<i>"Look, I am fond of tasty foods, but healthy foods also. For this, I make healthy foods in a tasty way."</i>
Participant 3	<i>"I always focus on tasty foods and based on the nature of my cravings, I make decisions of my food choices."</i>
Participant 4	<i>"I am vegetarian and this influences my food choices."</i>

Theme 1: health issue impacts the food choices of the students

Out of the primary data, it has been found that since few participants have high cholesterol, and other diseases, the health factors nurture and influence their food choices. One of them stated that *"I am health conscious and I have cholesterol issues"*.

2: Would you participate in a university meal program? Why or why not?

Participant 1	<i>"No, as it is not healthy."</i>
Participant 2	<i>"Yes, I like to explore new foods."</i>
Participant 3	<i>"Yes, I don't have any issue."</i>

Participant 4	<i>No, as the veg options are less there.</i>
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Theme 2: Participants have mixed views about participation to university meal program

It is seen that few of them are willing to participate and few are not as those are not healthy as per them. In this context they stated that *"No, as it is not healthy"* and *"Yes, I don't have any issue"*

3: When you think about eating healthy, what kind of foods do you think about? Which are available in your university? What is missing that you wish were available?

Participant 1	<i>"I mainly consider salad as healthy."</i>
Participant 2	<i>"Mainly low fat, low cholesterol diets."</i>
Participant 3	<i>"Based on my healthy needs, I make decisions"</i>
Participant 4	<i>"Only vegetable-based foods."</i>

4: How often do you make these healthy choices when they are/or would be available in your university?

Participant 1	<i>"Always I choose this."</i>
Participant 2	<i>"I try to eat healthy always, but always it is not possible."</i>
Participant 3	<i>"I am not so bothered."</i>
Participant 4	<i>"Always."</i>

Theme 3: Healthy food choices are always valuable and salad along with other low fat foods are considered healthy

Since salad does not contain any oil and fat, it is considered healthy. Other low fat foods are also healthy. It is always get attention of the people while choosing foods as one of them stated that *"I mainly consider salad as healthy."*

5: What foods do you consider less healthy in your university's vending machines/cafeteria? Why do you think they are less healthy?

Participant 1	<i>"Almost every item."</i>
Participant 2	<i>"I agree with this."</i>
Participant 3	<i>"I don't think any healthy food is there."</i>
Participant 4	<i>"I agree with them."</i>

6: How often do you make less healthy choices when they are available in your university vending machines/cafeteria?

Participant 1	<i>"Maybe once or twice in a week"</i>
Participant 2	<i>"Maybe twice a week."</i>
Participant 3	<i>"I can control why I think I should eat healthy. But based on my mood."</i>
Participant 4	<i>"Not sure, but twice a week roughly."</i>

Theme 4: University vending machine always contain less healthy foods and it is chosen maximum twice a week

Since the foods in the university vending machine are not home-made, most of those are unhealthy. However, it is not an issue to have those maximum twice a week. One participants stated that *"Maybe once or twice in a week"*

7: What university food changes in the past year do you like? What changes don't you like?

Participant 1	<i>"No such changes took since I enrolled in this university."</i>
Participant 2	<i>"I agree with this, as I have not seen any change. Even, I like the thing that some healthy items like low fat and low cholesterol have been included."</i>
Participant 3	<i>"In this context, I can say that in the last four years, some changes have occurred. I thing I have liked is the inclusion of some low-fat foods."</i>

Participant 4	<i>"It has been six months since I have come to this university and in the last four months, I am noticing some changes and those are the inclusion of some energy drinks and healthy meat-based items. The thing I dislike is as a vegetarian I do not find any noticeable option for me."</i>
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8: Have your eating habits changed at university since last fall? In what ways have they changed?

Participant 1	<i>"No, my eating habit has not been changed as I am strict about my health."</i>
Participant 2	<i>"No, I still have tasty foods."</i>
Participant 3	<i>"Before the last fall, I used to eat frequent unhealthy foods, but after that, I have reduced the frequency."</i>
Participant 4	<i>"No, I always eat veg."</i>

Theme 5: No such remarkable changes have been taken place in the university

No such notable changes have been taken place, but since the last six months some changes have happened. One participant said that *"It has been six months since I have come to this university and in the last four months, I am noticing some changes and those are the inclusion of some energy drinks and healthy meat-based items. The thing I dislike is as a vegetarian I do not find any noticeable option for me."*

9: What time do you go to lunch? What time would you prefer to take your lunch?

Participant 1	<i>"Near around 1 in the afternoon."</i>
Participant 2	<i>"I have lunch after 12 noon, and it is my preferable time."</i>
Participant 3	<i>"I have lunch around 2 in the afternoon as I have heavy breakfast."</i>
Participant 4	<i>"I eat around 1 in the afternoon."</i>

10: Do you feel like you have enough time to finish your food during lunch? Do you feel like you spend too much time standing in lines to prepare your food?

Participant 1	<i>"No, due to my busy schedule of classes. No, as I don't go to the vending machine."</i>
Participant 2	<i>"No as the classes are tightly scheduled. Sometimes, it takes a longer time."</i>
Participant 3	<i>"I agree that we do not have much time. Sometimes the lines are long and sometimes short."</i>
Participant 4	<i>"No, as I am vegetarian, I do not go there."</i>

Theme 6: Busy schedule of academics negatively influence the lunch time

The study schedule in the University of Wales is very hectic and for this, the students do not get time to have lunch on time. Few of the participants stated that *No as the classes are tightly scheduled. Sometimes, it takes a longer time."*

11: How many times in a day do you use vending machines? Where is the vending machine located? Does the location influence how often you use it?

Participant 1	<i>"I would say maybe once or twice a week."</i>
Participant 2	<i>"I use vending machines once a week"</i>
Participant 3	<i>"I buy all the time from the vending machine. Because for me, it's stress eating. I am a stress eater."</i>
Participant 4	<i>"I used to before I start this eating plan. But since I'm on my life-changing cycle, I don't take anything from there."</i>

12: Where do you get your nutrition information from?

Participant 1	<i>"I read the labels on the back of the products"</i>
Participant 2	<i>"I usually read all the information from the packaged foods"</i>
Participant 3	<i>"I generally do not read any of the product information instead I indulge in the articles and reading other sources to read the nutrition"</i>
Participant 4	<i>"I indulge in reading all the products labels"</i>

13: What kinds of information do you need to make healthy food choices?

Participant 1	<i>"I try my best to add flavour and variety"</i>
Participant 2	<i>"I try to avoid adding saturated fats and sugar"</i>
Participant 3	<i>"I try to get active and maintain a healthy weight"</i>
Participant 4	<i>"I do not skip breakfast"</i>

14: Would the availability of information in the kitchen area/ cafeteria influence your food choices?

Participant 1	<i>"Yes, accessibility influences my food choices and hence lack of availability is an issue in public universities"</i>
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Participant 2	<i>"Yes, however, taste and palatability are equally important too"</i>
Participant 3	<i>"Time constraint plays a crucial role in the same"</i>
Participant 4	<i>"Besides the availability, taste and texture play a crucial role"</i>

15: What can your university do to promote healthy eating?

Participant 1	<i>"I would like to participate in a university meal program. Because I would like to try different kinds of food, especially vegetarian and the environment changed, at that time, I prefer to cook by myself."</i>
Participant 2	<i>"I would like to see the University conducting educational programs on nutrition-related information"</i>
Participant 3	<i>"I prefer our institution to encourage students to indulge in healthy eating habits"</i>
Participant 4	<i>"More fitness programs will be expected to elevate the possible positive health outcomes"</i>

Discussion

Based on the results of the interview of the collected primary data, it was observed that health consciousness, tastefulness of the foods and the nature of the foods are the crucial factors that leave influence on the process of making the food choices of the postgraduate students. It was also observed that the health consciousness is

there as among the participants about the prevalence of cholesterol diabetes.. Due to this reason, it is seen that they are concerned about that and for this; few of them avoid unhealthy foods to control their blood cholesterol. At the same time, in terms of the nature of the foods, few are vegetarian because of diabetes. This is a crucial issue as this motivates the students to avoid non-vegetarian foods. On the other hand, the tastefulness of the foods is another crucial factor as it is found that some students consider only taste of the foods while making eating decisions. Even, they prefer to eat healthy foods also by preparing those in a tasty way.

The postgraduate students who are health conscious do not like to explore new foods while few prefer that as those provide new food experiences to them. The university meal programme is should be more diverse as the vegetarian students do not participate there because of lacking of effective vegetarian items. The students mainly consider salads as healthy food and along with this, they think that low-fat, low-cholesterol foods are healthy. Moreover, based on the health conditions of them, they decide the foods that can be beneficial for their health. The majority of post-graduation students always prefer to choose to eat healthy foods. Even, this is seen that, despite choosing always healthy foods, sometimes they consume unhealthy foods mainly once or twice a week. This can help them to keep the negative impacts of unhealthy foods on their bodies in control.

In the University kitchen and food vending machine, no such remarkable changes have taken place and for this, the postgraduate students are not highly bothered about that, rather they focus on homemade foods. However, meat-based items and energy drinks have been included for the last few years. It is also seen that since no such remarkable changes have taken place. Apart from this, it is seen that all are essential as it is seen that in most of cases, the postgraduate students do not develop any new flooding habits in terms of food items and food times. Even, since sometimes, the lines are huge and time-consuming in front of the kitchen and vending machine they prefer to avoid that. Therefore, it is seen that along with health consciousness, diseases like cholesterol and diabetes, and the unavailability of diverse foods are the crucial factors that shape the food choices and feeding habits of the postgraduate students of the University of Wales.

All these have met the expectations as it has explored the factors and the detailed aspects of the food habits of the postgraduate students. No such, alternative explanations are there as this has directly answered the research questions. It has

limited generalisability as the sample size is small. However, the variables like how the university can promote healthy food habits among the students are not addressed here in this report.

The results and the research findings acquired from the entire study have showcased the consistencies and the relevance of healthy eating interventions for postgraduate students studying in public institutions. The importance of the result lies in the fact that it validates the importance of introducing consistent healthy eating endeavours contributing to the development of positive healthy outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that in this report the detailed factors that influence the eating behaviours of the postgraduate students of the University of Wales have been explored. It has been found that this report has successfully determined all the predominant factors that influence the eating habits among the postgraduate students of the mentioned university. This report has explored the health consciousness, taste, availability of the foods at the university kitchen and vending machines, and the nature of the foods are the predominant factors here. It has utilised a focus group that contains the postgraduate students of the University of Wales.

The samples are 25-30 years of age and few of them are suffering from the health issues like cholesterol and diabetes. Due to this reason, they always prefer healthy foods to eat, but sometimes occasionally they eat unhealthy foods also. This report has also explored the areas of how these factors and what is the basis of the factors that are shaping the food habits of the students. Only the primary data has been collected for this report from the mentioned focus group as in terms of the topic of this research, only this is eligible to provide accurate and authentic data. The result section has portrayed all the answers to the research questions to make it a successful research study.

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