

Popularizing Nutrition Education to Improve Student Nutrition Literacy

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“We are raised in a culture that values expertise over exploration.”

–Nina Wise

HEALTH is an eternal theme for mankind. The World Health Organization (1986) defines health as a state of physical, mental, and social wellbeing of the individual. Nutrition is one of the major external determinants of human health. The concept of “nutrition literacy” was first raised by Tenhave et al. (1997) in their article titled “Literacy Assessment in a Cardiovascular Nutrition Education Setting.” Silk et al. (2008) defined nutrition literacy as the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand nutrition information and skills needed in order to make appropriate nutrition decisions. Adequate nutrition literacy is beneficial for the individual obtaining correct dietary information, improving their dietary patterns and preventing chronic diseases.

Since the mid-20th century, many countries have become aware of the importance of nutrition education for individual and national development. Japan is among the nations that initiated nutrition education the earliest. From 1945 on, Japan enacted the nutrition law, established the accreditation system for nutritionist qualifications, and advanced the “National Health Promotion Movement for the 21st Century” to achieve the goal of improving students’ physical fitness (Sakagami, 2004). The U.S.’s 1946 National School Lunch Act created the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to provide low-cost or free school lunch meals to eligible students through subsidies to schools (Institute of Medicine Committee, 1997). The UK’ National Curriculum mandates schools to offer cooking and nutrition education courses with course credits included in the overall academic results of the individual. In Denmark, the national curriculum program stipulates that students need to receive two years of cooking education between the fourth and seventh grades, which includes training on cooking techniques as well as nutrition knowledge, food hygiene and culture, etc., with a view to encourage young people to learn to cook for themselves rather than depending on fast food. The German government provides experiential nutrition education for students by implementing the “Public Kitchen” program.

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Parents and representatives of government departments are also invited to participate in the program so that all parties including schools contribute to the development of healthy dietary behavior in children (Bates & Eccles, 2008).

Despite the increased awareness of the importance of healthy diet and lifestyle in the international community, one-third or more of the world population are still suffering from diet-related malnutrition and consequential issues such as obesity and chronic diseases, due to economic development and changes in the pace of life (Mannar, 2020). There is growing interest in how to improve nutrition literacy of the public. Several nutrition literacy measurement tools have been developed. In 2007, Diamond (2007) created the Nutritional Literacy Scale (NLS), using the Short Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults (S-TOFHLA), one of the commonly used and validated measures of health literacy, as a model. Gibbs and Chapman-Novakofski (2013) verified content validity of the Nutrition Literacy Assessment Instrument (NLAI) through an online questionnaire survey. Using the Delphi process, Liao and Lai (2017) developed a set of nutrition literacy (NL) indicators for Taiwan college students, serving as a basis to develop Taiwan College's Nutrition Literacy Scale and providing information on nutrition education.

The Relationship between Prospective Teachers' Nutritional Literacy and Healthy Lifestyle Behaviors in this issue is a quantitative study on the correlation between the nutrition literacy and healthy lifestyle in pre-service teachers and the influence of factors such as gender, living environment, nutritional state on the relation, using the Adolescent Nutritional Literacy Scale and Health Promoting Lifestyle Profile – II. The findings of the correlation research show a moderately positive relationship between nutrition literacy and healthy lifestyle in these teacher candidates. The study suggests that nutrition education and training should be administered to students at all levels including higher education (Usta & Mertoglu, 2023).

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