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Educational Research Association
The International Journal of
Educational Researchers 2021,
12(3): 52-59
ISSN: 1308-9501



<http://ijer.eab.org.tr>

The Effect of Creative Nutritional Meals on Achieving a Balanced and Sufficient Nutritional Habit

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Abstract

School-age is the period in which children's physical, social, emotional, mental, and aesthetic development is experienced most intensely. In particular, a balanced and healthy diet is essential for growth and development. The inability of children to get enough of these essential nutrients will negatively affect both their growth and development and their academic success. During this period when basic habits are acquired, it is a big problem for students to choose food, not to eat the food they need, or to eat one type and with excessive portions. According to preservice teachers, it was investigated what aesthetic and attractive forms can be used to increase the taste of a standard nutritious meal, make it healthier, and ensure its consumption. The study tried to determine the predictions of Eskişehir Osmangazi University (ESOGÜ) senior class preservice primary teachers on creative nutrition meals in the 2019-2020 academic year. According to the research findings, preservice teachers think that for students to eat their nutritional meals, these meals should be given by using more popular meals, while the items in the mandatory food group should be creatively prepared. They also think that to make the nutrients attractive, they should combine creative/aesthetic forms using items that attract the child's interest.

Keywords: Nutrition, food styling, healthy eating, creativity

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Introduction

Nutrition, which is one of the basic needs of human beings, is the use of nutrients for growth, development, maintaining a quality of life and preserving health (Baysal, 2012). Adequate and balanced nutrition comes first among the health behaviours that individuals should acquire starting from childhood. (Baysal 2012, Süoğlu, 2004, Sivri & Özpulat, 2015). The basic condition of a balanced and adequate diet, which has become even more important today, is to take correct and sufficient amounts of nutrients from all nutrients. While adequate and balanced nutrition is important for a healthy and quality life in every period of life, the value of nutrition is even greater in the school-age, when growth and development accelerate and learning, and cognitive functions gain importance. Insufficient intake of energy and nutrients in school children negatively affect growth, development, and school success (Belderson, et al. 2003: 1003, Mahoney, et al., 2005: 636, Şanlıer and Foreign, 2005, Müftüoğlu, 2003). The eating habits gained in the preliminary period causes no nutritional problems in the future and therefore emerges as a prerequisite for a healthy and quality life.

Healthy children are essential for the healthy future of societies. For children to be healthy and healthy adults, they must grow up in a healthy environment. In this sense, school-age children first imitate their parents' eating habits and then continue the habits that they have acquired in the school environment where they spend most of their time. Today's work life, media, cultural interactions, and time shape these eating habits. Eating takeaway foods, convenience foods, semi-ready foods, and avoiding eating with meals prepared in a hurry, and Eating outside the home, consuming a single food group, eating the same food constantly, craving to eat something, eating with curiosity and similar eating attitudes bring along certain wrong habits. At the same time, these eating attitudes cause inadequate and unbalanced nutrition. Therefore, these cause many diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. For example, according to Turkey childhood obesity research (CO-Tur, 2016), the rate of being overweight among primary school 2nd-grade children was 14.6%, and the obesity rate was found to be 9.9%. Besides, 1,5% of children were underweighted below normal (Valeria, et al. 2013: 502, Karakaş & Törnük, 2016: 293, Yılmazbaş & Gökçay, 2018: 103, Deleş, 2019: 23, Şahin et al, 2018: 127).

It is significant to have healthy eating habits as well as eating well during these childhood periods. It is difficult for individuals who could not adopt the right habits as children to get rid of these habits in adulthood. Since the nutritional habits gained in this period will also be reflected in the adult period, the nutritional status of school-age children should be evaluated well, and children should be given adequate and balanced nutrition habits. Schools are the most ideal places for nutritional education because most of the children can be reached. Nutrition education programs given in schools have a key place in terms of giving children the right eating habits. In schools, it is tried to prevent health problems that may occur with nutrition through the food eaten. MoNE tries to regulate and direct the nutritional habits of school-age children by making the necessary legal regulations. In this sense, MoNE strives to control food in school canteens, dining halls and similar places in terms of health and provides nutrition education and guidance to students, parents, and teachers. Also, MoNE controls and inspects quality food service and presentation, nutrition-friendly school projects aimed at calculating nutrients and calories under the supervision of a dietician, and gaining nutritional habits (Karakaş & Törnük, 2016: 293).

For adequate and balanced nutrition, four food groups (milk and derivatives, meat, eggs and legumes, vegetables, fruits, and bread-cereals) should be taken at each meal (Şimşek et al., 2009). The main purpose of eating practices in schools is to give children a healthy eating habit. It has been observed that the food eaten at schools improves the nutritional quality of children, provides nutritional diversity, and increases the consumption of vegetables and fruits. When planning school menus, numerous factors, from the colour of the food to the consistency of the food, from the salt to the presentation of the material, by considering the principles of healthy eating, affect the edibility of the food (Garipoğlu & Özgüneş, 2008: 155).

There are two main problems in the formation of eating habits. One of them is a large and unbalanced diet, and another is a low and inadequate diet. While some children eat a lot of food unhealthy and unbalanced, some children show marked resistance to eating. Skipping meals is one of the unhealthiest nutritional situations. Children skipping meals skip meals either because they are consuming more, or

fewer nutrients required for them. Whether it is a loss of appetite or eating a lot of and unbalanced food, the main problem is related to the amount and type of food that the child should consume daily. Although children love some foods, they need to eat from all food groups without choosing a meal. For children to acquire healthy eating habits, they should be given the way they like or other foods that provide energy (carbohydrates, fats, vitamins) and do not provide energy (minerals and vitamins-fat/water-soluble). Forcing children to eat foods that they do not like to eat or preventing them from consuming only one type of food negatively affects eating behaviours in children. For this, it is necessary to find different ways to eat the food in the desired amount and variety (Üzgün, 2017: 17, Işkın & Sarıışık, 2017: 35).

According to the results of the research conducted by Yılmaz (2011) on a 5-6-year-old kindergarten student, it was concluded that food selectivity was observed in children, especially vegetables and salads were consumed less. He also suggested that instead of forcing children, different food preparation and cooking methods should be used, and the correct intake of vitamins and minerals should be ensured. Aytekin (2013) found that when fairy tales support nutrition, children's interest in recognizing foods increases. In a study by Turan (2016), it was investigated the nutrition-related health problems of children aged 3-6 and found that there were significant differences between the health problems experienced by children and having foods they dislike. In his nutritional habits research, Köroğlu (2009) found that parents' behaviour towards food causes nutritional problems in their children. Cebirbay and Aktaş (2016) stated in their study that the knowledge level of parents about nutrition should be increased. Çetin (2019) stated that eating is a social event in evaluating the menus and nutritional status of children in kindergartens, and especially the visual memory of children aged 2-5 is at the forefront (Üzgün, 2017: 23, Küren, 2019: 23, Çetin, 2019). In other studies on school children at different times in different regions of our country, it was also observed that there were some similarities and differences in eating habits (Demirezen & Coşansu, 2005; Dikmen, 2006; Keskin, 2009; Kutlu & Çivi, 2009; Pazarlı, 2008; Süzek & Arı, 2010).

School/student menus, which are the first stage of planning school meals, aim to protect children from hunger, provide growth and development and positively affect cognitive functions. Therefore, when preparing school menus, healthy eating principles and children's needs are planned first, and then the menu. It is exceedingly difficult to please students with different eating habits with a single menu. By increasing the interest in the menu, which is the same as the content, the consumable menu can be increased. In practice, when preparing school menus, students' preferences are mostly prioritized instead of these principles. Students' eating the dishes on their plates is related to their preference for that food and their curiosity about the attractiveness of the food. Socio-cultural relations, symbolic roles and emotional states are effective in nutrition instead of nutrition the body only physically. To increase the edibility of the food, when the food is presented to the students by creatively designed and put into aesthetic forms, the student will be affected by this design and will be curious and inclined to eat.

In the present study, it was aimed to take the opinions of the preservice teachers for the students to gain the habit of consuming the foods in their meals with creative food designs. Another reason why the appearance of the food is important is thought to be its effect on sight and taste. Considering the roles and importance of our visual and aesthetic perceptions in our daily life, it is thought that the importance of the appearance of food increases even more. Zellner (2014) states that the appearance of food ready to eat conveys people a lot of information about food and most importantly, helps people determine what they eat. According to Zellner, "The first taste is always taken with the eyes", even a simple visual clue about the colour of a food or drink affects our experience of food or drink (as cited in Uçuk, 2017).

In the presentation of food, Bulat et al. (2014), composition, surface textures, shapes and sizes are compatible. Mentioning that a composition is a form and work of creating a whole by bringing together separate parts, Bulat et al. (2014) defines the composition as a meaningful whole formed by bringing the pieces together in the order in the work of art (as cited in Uçuk, 2017). In the research, the relationship between the creative composition of the food and the consumption of the food was examined.

This present study is considered important as it can bring latest information to the field about food aesthetics for school-age children, which has an important place in the field of gastronomy and culinary

arts in the context of presenting trends of school/student meals. Besides, it is important as it is possible to reach findings that can both provide a healthy and balanced diet and improve the sense of artistic aesthetics with food by transferring the practices of preparing creative food/meal designs to the local flavours of our country.

Method

The research will be carried out in the phenomenological design. Phenomenology covers people's perceptions and experiences against a phenomenon. The study examined the perceptions and predictions of 19 senior preservice primary school teachers studying at ESOGÜ about the cosmetic/aesthetic stance of lunchboxes and menus (image of food) prepared in the nutrition act in primary schools in 2019-2020 academic year. Semi-structured opinions were made to see the differences in the opinions of the teacher preservice teachers and to understand the visual evaluations of the meals during nutrition hours. In the study, it was aimed to understand/interpret visual/aesthetic elements in the nutritional meal of the teacher preservice teachers based on their experiences, again with their explanations. The research is limited to the opinions of preservice primary school teachers on the quality of nutrition times at school. Participants were determined voluntarily from among the preservice primary school teachers who started their internship with simulated sampling. Each pre-service teacher filled the semi-structured interview form electronically in 1 week. The data obtained from these interviews were analysed thematically and classified under certain headings to understand the phenomenon. To create these headings, the opinions and paragraphs reported were determined and marked for coding. This procedure was done separately by the researcher and another expert. In the findings section, the theme titles were interpreted by making direct quotations from semi-structured interviews.

Findings and Results

Tables related to the findings obtained in the study to reveal the expectations of the preservice teachers from creative nutrition meals are given below. The answers given by the preservice teachers regarding the question 'What do you think can be done for primary school children to have their meals brought from home during nutrition hours at school?' were collected under 4 sections.

Table 1- Things to do for primary school students to willingly eat nutritional meals in terms of the preservice teachers

Views of the Preservice Teachers	Answers given f	Answers given %
Preparation of meals together at home	4	21,0
Use the imagination	6	31,5
Doing activities that increase appetite	4	21,0
Using food and materials that children love	5	26,5

Preservice primary school teachers think that imagination of primary school students should be used for students to eat their meals willingly at nutrition time (f = 6), children's favourite food and materials (f = 5) (lunch box, flask, etc.), meals should be prepared together at home and appetite enhancing activities. Preservice ones think that children's nutritional meals can be more effective when prepared using their imagination and with the food that children love. Some statements regarding this are given below.

"P18-First of all, we should not give our children ready and packaged foods too often, so that the child can choose the foods prepared by his mother at home instead of making an unfamiliar habit. We should keep a variety of the meals we put for our child for nutrition and appeal to his eyes and stimulate the feeling of eating. We should explain the importance of healthy eating to him in numerous ways and tell him that he should not consume fast food style foods. The most crucial tool to ensure that the child enjoys eating is consciousness and the appeal to the eyes of the meal we put on our child, the desire to eat. The teacher can have the students watch videos from the smart board that attract the attention of

the students, draw attention to the healthy foods consumed on time and the day brought from home, and that will motivate the students. Likewise, using vegetables and fruits such as tangerines, olives, cheese, eggs, carrots, tomatoes, which they will bring from home, a nice breakfast plate can be prepared with the students (it can be in the shape of a face or it can be in the form of an object that the student wants using his imagination). In short, all kinds of games, activities, songs, videos, etc. will motivate our students according to their age.” “P3-Having the teacher eats with them too, and with it, eating can make the job fun. He can rejuvenate and eat what children eat. For example, we can pretend to talk to bread and say that I want to go to the stomach of this little student.” “P5-An instructive cartoon can be opened during nutrition hours; the teacher can make a puppet show to the students or healthy fruits can be distributed to the students during nutrition hours. Students may be offered the option to bring a favourite fruit each day. Riddles can be asked during nutrition hours. A song about healthy eating can be written in the classroom and this song can be singed at nutrition time.” “P17-The teacher said to them in the lesson before nutrition time, “We are very hungry, right?” “Should ask questions like. He should even say that he is also hungry but has nothing to do with him. (However, he should express these expressions 5-10 minutes before the end of the lesson.) In this way, the children both share their food with the teacher and eat them with love.” “P6-I want to answer this question by giving an example. I have a sibling in 3rd grade. My mother gets up in the morning and prepares something for nutrition time for my brother, but my brother often brings that prepared meal home without eating it or distributes it to his friends in class. The classroom teacher was telling us about this. Later, my mother started to prepare by asking my brother before he prepared the food for my sister. Even if he wanted something unhealthy, my mother prepared it with healthy ingredients and put it in a lunch box. So, my brother started eating the food that was put in his lunchbox. Something like this can be done. The student can be consulted. After all, since it is the student who has food, he must choose the food he needs to eat.” “P11-Children can be shown a cartoon with children nutrition before nutrition time. For example, cute friends can be watched cartoons at the dinner table. Nutrition can be provided with play.” “P12- First, a common nutrition program should be created for all children. Collaboration with families to prepare daily meals of the students, loved by families, and so on. And situations such as should be considered. Food that may be attractive to children should be included in nutrition programs. During nutrition hours, materials such as cartoons should be opened from the smartboard and these hours should be made funny. The teacher should follow the nutrition program and evaluate this hour with the students. Thus, the teacher will be a model for children. Students will take the teacher as a model over time. It will be encouraging to eat the nutrition time and the meals they bring.” “P14-If families prepare lunch boxes for children with the things they love, students can enjoy it. Teachers can prevent this by telling children how harmful food sold in packages can be.”

Table 2- Creative solutions of the preservice ones to make the nutritional meals attractive

Views of the Preservice Teachers	Answers given f	Answers given %
Through games	3	16,0
Using artistic creative forms	7	36,8
Decorating food with different / various foods	4	21,0
Using items that interest the child	5	26,2

In terms of the preservice teachers, the creative forms in which the food is introduced (f = 7) that will make the school nutrition meals attractive, and then using the elements that will attract the attention of the child (f = 5) are.

Sample views of the preservice teaches are as in the followings.

“P2-We can make children feel like they are in a game at mealtime. For example, we can gradually incorporate food into the process as if it were tackling a challenging task. In this process, we join the game with him.” “P5-We can make decorations to the liking of children. For example, when we prepare a sandwich, it may have a mouth, nose and eyes made of olives.” “P1- Students can create a mask, for

example, on plastic plates with fruits and vegetables they will bring from home. Or it can be made to simulate loved ones to a building or an item. their most recent works can be displayed and enjoyed.” “P3- A talking dummy version of food can be made. The fact that food is puppet will attract the attention of children. However, puppets will attract the attention of children to talk about their benefits.” “P7- foods can be improved in appearance. Foods with a beautiful appearance may attract more attention. A different nutrition menu can be prepared every day. food can be prepared in smaller and different ways.” “P4- Food may have interesting inscriptions on it. For example, "Eat me, stay alive / eat me open your mind, you can write interesting articles that will make students' eating meals attractive.” “P5- Animal figures or smiling faces can be made from foods. If we are going to prepare a nutrition menu, we can prepare a nutrition menu by making joint decisions with our students. They can bring reward meals in their daily diet. Once a week, we can prepare our own food in class with our students.” “P8- Mother and child can prepare and decorate their nutrition meals together. The amount of food can be reduced. It is more important to want it again than to be eaten by force. The nutritional meal can also be attractive if it is given to the child that eating is a remarkable thing. The teacher is asked to prepare healthy foods as homework every day and bring them during nutrition hours the next day. So, children also wonder what their friends are preparing.” “P9- For example, kids can buy lunch boxes with their favourite characters printed. Boiled eggs can be made in the shape of a penguin, apples can be cut with shaped moulds, shapes can be made with black olives on white cheese, and cucumbers can be cut in different shapes.” “P10- The teacher can start telling a story and add to the story about the food in the students' meals, respectively.” “P11- We can make eating fun. For example, we line up the superheroes one by one and they have food next to them. 'Heroes have fed and gotten stronger. Do you want to feed and get stronger?' we can say.” “P14- In cooperation with the family, sample images can be shown to make the meals to be brought on that day interesting. It can be ensured that families prepare nutrition in this direction. Presentations can be made to students about how the foods they eat have benefits for their body. Nutrition encouraging and informative posters can be prepared and hung in the classroom. By keeping the nutrition hours, a little longer, shapes and such can be made from the diets brought with the teacher. Nutrition that will attract interesting children can be taken from the containers.”

Conclusion and Suggestions

Children's eating habits can turn into wrong behaviours either at home or school. That is, a healthy eating process under the supervision of family members at home can turn into mistakes due to the lack of supervision at school, while nutrition habits that cannot be transferred at home can be corrected at school. No matter how it develops, children's wrong eating habits bring important health problems. Therefore, the lack of adequate nutrition education at home and school causes malnutrition habits (Orhan & Çelik, 2014)

This present study is about the level of taste of the food brought from home by primary school children to have a sufficient and balanced diet with all nutrients. Accordingly, the preservice teachers stated that the food items/meals that children like were prepared at home using their imagination and that the students preferred more. However, only the child's loved ones or the family should take into account the types and rates of nutrition for a balanced and adequate diet. By putting the foods that children like in their lunchboxes, families may be able to prepare inadequate milk, vegetable, and fruit groups, while on the other hand, they can prepare foods rich in cereals (bagels, pastries, bread). Even worse, children may not like their diet and may be fed at the school canteen. In this case, it is thought that the children are fed unilaterally since the lunch boxes of the students are not prepared sufficiently and in a balanced way. In terms of preservice teachers' responses, the fact that home-prepared nutritional meals are designed to suit children alongside the food they like (creative shape/form) increases the interest in the meal.

Regarding the preservice teachers' responses, the way to increase the interest in food is to make creative forms and food (visual and tasteful) designs for the child's interest. In this way, by making nutrition attractive, children are motivated, and consumption is provided by using the cosmetic properties of foods.

Because it is seen that there are a series of intellectual activities based on food design, a solution to the current problem is sought, and countless and different efforts are realized until this solution is found. The relationship between gastronomy and design is the establishment of aesthetic relationships by transforming food into popular forms. Just as the advertising sector increases the level of appreciation, innovations in food can attract the interest and appreciation of the people as in the advertisements. (Uçuk & Özkanlı, 2017). Within the scope of the research findings, families should receive education about nutritional elements, types and varieties about healthy enough and nutrition, prepare children's lunchboxes according to this education, teachers should follow the necessary guidance and follow-up in this training, and also about simple aesthetic food designs related to food designs of families. it is recommended to benefit from the examples. In the aesthetic preparation of food, it is recommended to educate, guide, and present, develop and share design examples, especially for teachers and then parents.

Also, programs should be created to ensure that children are fed with healthy foods by increasing the attraction of nutritional meals by reducing their nutrition with unhealthy foods, physical activities should be supported, healthy nutrition literacy guides should be created, family-based guides and guiding services should be established for obese and weak students.

Disclosure

No authors have any conflict-of-interest report.

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