ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Promoting healthy food education for elementary school children at post Merapi eruption area of Cangkringan district, Yogyakarta, Indonesia: A quasi experimental study using 'learning with fun' approach

Agnes Erida Wijayanti *1,2, Lely Lusmilasari², Mora Claramita³

¹Department of Nursing, Wira Husada School of Health Sciences, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

²Department of Nursing, Faculty of Medicine, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

³Department of Medical Education and Department of Family and Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Received: August 14, 2016	Accepted: October 10, 2016	Online Published: November 15, 2016
DOI: 10.5430/jnep.v7n3p128	URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/jnep	o.v7n3p128

ABSTRACT

Background: Knowledge and attitudes towards healthy food intake influence the growth and development of school-aged children. Cangkringan district of Yogyakarta, Indonesia was the worst area affected by the Mount Merapi eruption in 2010 and has a long-term consequence of less healthy food available for school-age children. This study aimed to determine the effect of health education to increase knowledge and attitudes towards healthy food intake for elementary school children at Cangkringan. Methods: Respondents of this study were 338 elementary school children (134 boys and 204 girls, ages between 8–10 years old) at Cangkringan. There were 20 elementary schools involved and participants were divided into 36 groups to make small groups of 6 to 8 students. Interventions of this study involved serial health education via 'learning with fun' approach using a student-centered learning method. The authors developed all tools and instruments based on the guidelines from The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). We analyzed the knowledge and attitude of the subjects after administering a pre and posttest using paired t-test and Wilcoxon range test.

Results: The results showed significant increase of knowledge and attitudes towards healthy food intake (p < .001 for both knowledge and attitude) of all subjects in this study.

Conclusions: Health education using 'learning with fun' method may increase knowledge and attitudes of elementary school children. Furthermore, a series of cooking-classes as a student-centered learning approach, which emphasized contextual, collaborative and constructive methods of learning served well to increase motivation and satisfaction of the students to learn about healthy food.

Key Words: Health education, Learning with fun approach, Student-centered learning, nutrition, Cangkringan Indonesia

1. INTRODUCTION

velopment of school-aged children. This condition could

potentially interfere with the development during the early Diseases and malnutrition will affect the growth and de- learning periods.^[1] Knowledge or the cognitive domain is an important domain to stimulate behavior changing (overt be-

^{*} Correspondence: Agnes Erida Wijayanti; Email: eridaagnes@gmail.com; Address: Department of Nursing, Wira Husada School of Health Sciences, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

havior). Social cognitive theory acknowledges the influential role of evolutionary factors of learning in human adaptation and change, which accommodates a more active contextual learning.^[2] One of the implementations of that theory is an active learning method that provides engaging enrichment experiences for reflection and experiential learning.

A study by Leong showed that Health education using active learning methods with a booklet, flipchart and cooking competition significantly increased the knowledge and attitudes on healthy food intake for school-aged children.^[3] Active learning is an appropriate and important way for children to develop skills and knowledge and positive attitudes toward learning. In this approach, children are challenged to learn more actively by encountering real life experiences and learning activities to use the power of imagination in every situation. It takes full advantage of the opportunity to learn through spontaneous activity while playing, and doing some fun cruising activity. They learn to conduct a situation analysis, looking at and reflecting on life events, as well as focusing on active learning.^[4]

A study of an elementary school in Taiwan, reported that 50% of 1,218 respondents had low knowledge about the importance of healthy nutrition. Better nutrition can lead to better knowledge and attitudes as foundations of critical thinking skills. It is important to have a healthy diet for school children both at home as well as at school. However, most school children might not consume sufficient nutritious food in their daily life.^[5] Another study in Brazil in 2004 also reported similar low knowledge among 90% of 573 elementary school children who had a low knowledge of healthy nutrition.^[6]

Nevertheless, different results were found by a study in New Zealand where approximately 80% of the students reported that they can cook a meal from basic ingredients either fairly or very easily. The ability to prepare meals was consistent with the better knowledge and health status among schoolage children in New Zealand. This study of Utter et al. from New Zealand explored secondary school children who are older students than from the previous studies from Taiwan and Brazil. We aimed to replicate Utter's design into our study, but applied the methods to elementary school children. Learning to cook and having the opportunity to cook may provide unique means for children to develop life skills and contribute positively to their families. Future research examining the relationships between cooking and health may include measures beyond nutrition, such as social relationships and emotional wellbeing.^[7] Contributions of active teaching-learning methodologies had raised awareness towards healthy habits: particularly, feeding and physical exercising. The use of active methodologies may unfold new

possibilities towards healthy habits and practices.^[8]

In Indonesia, a national survey based on the Basic Health Research of Indonesia, showed that there is a less optimum body growth or 'thinness' of elementary school-aged children (below the red line or below normal) ranged from 2% to 12% per province among 33 provinces. Nationally, there were 4% 'very thin' and 7% 'thin'. Whereas, the prevalence of the school-aged children who are so called 'very thin' was lowest in Bali with 2.3%, Special Region of Yogyakarta 2.5% and the highest was in East Nusa Tenggara with 7.8%.

Besides the issue of thinness, there is a problem of obesity among school age children in Indonesia. School children aged 5-12 years have 18.8% and 10.8% who are 'overweight' and 'very overweight' respectively and 8.8% were considered 'obese'. The prevalence of obesity was lowest in East Nusa Tenggara with 8.7% and the highest was in Jakarta that was 30.1%. The prevalence of obesity in Yogyakarta province where this study was done was 9.2%.^[9]

Health professionals, especially nurses, have very important roles of promoting healthy lifestyles including healthy food intake and adequate nutrition supply for school-age children especially for nurses who have daily contact with the public.^[10] This study aimed to determine the effect of health education to increase knowledge and attitudes towards healthy food intake for elementary school children at Cangkringan district, Yogyakarta through using a 'learning with fun approach' with a series of interesting cooking classes. Focusing more on a student-centered learning approach served well to increase knowledge and attitudes towards healthy food intake for elementary school children in the Cangkringan district, Yogyakarta.

2. МЕТНОР

2.1 Design and sample

This study was an experimental research with a one-group pretest-posttest design. The study was conducted at 20 elementary schools in the Cangkringan district Sleman Yogyakarta Indonesia. The authors were interested about the Cangkringan district of Yogyakarta for this study setting because it has the characteristics of more underdeveloped areas, and was severely effected by the Mount Merapi explosion in 2010; while having 20 elementary schools which are now full of school-aged children who need more attention for their learning development.

2.2 Context of this study

Cangkringan is an area that was badly affected by the eruption of Mount Merapi on the 26th of October, 2010 with two of five villages being hit by hot ash clouds. The impact of this disaster resulted in numerous occurrences of emergencies in all fields including emergency situations and problems in health and nutrition. Health problems often arise at post-disaster sites when disaster victims become used to consuming 'ready to eat food' (food to make sure the victims get the intake of energy, protein and fat to maintain life), for examples: biscuits, instant noodles, and instant cereal.^[11] However, six years later the children in the Cangkringan district are still eating instant noodles in the consumption of their everyday meals, instead of their parents trying to prepare a more nutritious and proper meal for them. This phenomenon may be happening because of a lack of education and be due to less adequate health promotion about the importance of healthy food intake, especially in nationwide programs for the members of families with school-aged children.

The context of this study is that there are no formal cafeterias assigned to supply regular meals for the school aged children in the Cangkringan district, Yogyakarta. Elementary schools in the Cangkringan district start at 7 o'clock a.m. and are finished at 12 o'clock noon with two 15 minutes break in between classes for recess time. This kind of school-period from seven to twelve is common all around Indonesia. Students rarely bring their meal from home, rarely take regular breakfast and usually they buy less expensive food from small food vendors in front of the elementary schools, where the nutrition, hygiene and sanitation could not be guaranteed.

2.3 Subject of the study

Respondents in this research included 134 boys and 204 girls between 8-10 years old who live in the Cangkringan district. Total number of respondents was 338 school aged children. Determination of the number of respondents used cluster sampling by considering the following inclusion and exclusion criteria: willing to be the subjects of this study, following the statements filled in the informed consent form and would like to follow through with research process procedures. Exclusion was serious illness before or while joining this study. Teachers helped to select respondents and also asked parents for permission and willingness to participate in this research. Given informed consent of subjects in this study, our proposal was approved by the ethics committee of Gadjah Mada University Yogyakarta, Indonesia. (Approval Letter Ref: KE/FK/915/EC/2015 dated 23 July 2015) (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Procedures of sample selection

Measurement of knowledge and attitudes was conducted using questionnaires consisting of a multiple-choice test and matching pictures (see Figure 2). The questionnaire about knowledge and attitudes developed by the researchers adopted the guidelines for assessing nutrition related knowledge, attitudes and practices of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in Rome, 2014. The questionnaire had

previously been used in related research by Zalilah et al. (2008) in Malaysia with 335 research subjects.

2.4 Instrument

Collection of data using pretest and posttest instruments was as follows: Instrument number 1 was a set of questionnaires A consisting of personal data of respondent (gender, age, parents' education, parent's job) (see Table 1). Instrument number 2 was a set of questionnaires B consisting of questions of knowledge on healthy food; Children's understanding about healthy food including 10 messages of balanced nutrition (thankful and joyful, eat plenty fruits and vegetable; accustomed to consume high protein side dishes, consuming kinds of staple food, limitation of sweet food, fatty and other ingredients, accustomed to eating breakfast, drinking enough water; reading food packaging labels; importance of hand washing, and physical activity. The questions numbered 20 items consisting of matching pictures and explanations; and multiple-choice questions using 'Yes' (scored 1) or 'No' (scored zero). Instrument number 3 was a set of questionnaires C consisting of questions on attitudes about healthy food; positive responses were shown by the children in choosing, preparing and consuming healthy food in daily life. These questionnaires used a 4 point-Likert scale: For positive sentences, 1 meant very disagree; 2 meant disagree; 3 meant agree; and 4 meant very agree. For negative questions, 1 meant very disagree, 3 meant disagree; and 4 meant very disagree; 3 meant disagree; and 4 meant very disagree.



Figure 2. Research procedure

Prior to distribution of questionnaires, the authors tested the validity and reliability of the questionnaires on 30 samples of school-age children with similar characteristics in elementary schools from different districts. Of the 30 questions of knowledge there were 9 items rejected, whereas for the 20 attitude questions 7 items were rejected. The rejected items were then modified into more meaningful sentences. Reliability test results in the area of knowledge showed Cronbach's alpha value of 0.861 and in the area of attitude showed Cronbach's alpha value of 0.756. The questionnaires had previously been tested using pictures and interesting writing with Indonesian language, establishing the reliability and

face validity of the instrument.^[13]

All questionnaires were tested for the content validity by experts at the Department of Nursing, Faculty of Medicine, the Department of Medical Education, and the Department of Family and Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Gadjah Mada University.

2.5 Ethical approval

This study was approved by Medical and Health Research Ethics Committee (MHREC), of the Faculty of Medicine Gadjah Mada University (Approval Letter Ref: KE/FK/915/EC/2015 dated 23 July 2015).

Variables		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	134	39.6
	Female	204	60.4
Age	8 years	50	14.8
	9 years	197	58.3
	10 years	91	26.9
Father Education	Elementary	143	42.3
	Secondary	153	45.3
	High	42	12.4
Mother Education	Elementary	151	44.7
	Secondary	145	42.9
	High	42	12.4
Father occupation	Work at home	127	37.6
	Working outside home	209	61.8
	Does not work	2	0.6
Mother occupation	Work at home	96	28.4
	Working outside home	176	52.1
	Does not work	66	19.5

Table 1. Characteristics of research samples (n = 338)

2.6 Procedures

As shown in Figure 2 it can be explained that the research process followed a step by step method starting from, to make the questionnaire about knowledge and attitudes, then to do the validity and reliability tests, next to make the booklet and flip chart, then to make a lesson plan for the health class (100 minutes) and lesson plan for the cooking class (120 minutes) (see Figure 3). Participants were assured that all information would be confidential and their participation in the study was voluntary without any cost and they have the right to refuse to participate in the study at any point in the study. Also, a written approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Gadjah Mada University Yogyakarta, Indonesia.





Researchers conducted a coordination meeting with the educator team, research assistants, and also the headmaster and teachers. To have the same perception of conducting health promotion on healthy food to the school children in this study, the educator team was required to conduct a micro teaching, using the research instruments and then were given feedback by peers, prior to the implementation of this study.

After that, the team of researchers conducted a pre-test, and

then did the health education intervention in a class with 36 groups, using a flip chart and distributed booklets. These activities were followed by a cooking contest together with the 36 groups; after a one-week break, involving the preparation time for the cooking class. A post-test were obtained one week after the cooking contest from the 36 groups, and data were collected for analysis.

In summary of procedures, this study was divided into three

phases: pre intervention, interventions (health education of healthy food) and post intervention.^[14] Pre intervention consisted of giving informed consent forms to the subjects of this study and their parents and also explaining the way to fill and answer the questionnaire about knowledge and attitudes (see Figure 4). The intervention (implementation of health education) used a flipchart and booklet with a total time of 100 minutes in the classroom, where the children are invited to play with puzzles to match pictures and writing about food items.^[15] After a week the implementation of

health education in the classroom was then performed by preparing breakfast cooking competitions simultaneously for twenty primary schools with 36 groups. Implementation of competition included selection of the best champion with an established assessment that has been set and judged by a nutritionist as the jury. Methods of education in this intervention are the methods of active learning, so that children can have fun in the learning process. After one week of intervention we conducted a posttest^[16]



Figure 4. Representation of Questionnaire Knowledge and Attitude

2.7 Data analyses

Data were analyzed with statistical calculations using SPSS version 21. Univariate data tests were used to determine the frequency distribution of the personal data of respondents that included: gender and ages of children, parental education, and parental occupation. Normality test for the distribution of data used the Kolmogorov Smirnov test. To determine the ratio before and after the intervention, the Paired-sample *t*-test was used for normally distributed data. However, in this study, the data were not normally distributed and therefore we used the Wilcoxon test.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Characterization of school age children from this study

Cangkringan is one of the districts in Sleman, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The distance to the Capital District Government Center Sleman is 25 km. and the subdistrict Cangringan has school age children, who are in 20 elementary schools. Health education activities for primary school age children in the district Cangkringan have never been done. Programs from Cangkringan health center for primary school children are screening of health (nutrition, dental health, and vision conditions) through the activities of BIAS (School Children Immunization Month) conducted only on a new student in

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class I. The Elementary School School Health Unit (UKS) for 20 primary schools does not function continuously; UKS is used only when there is a sick student. From the observations conducted by researchers during the study in the district of Cangkringan, researchers found many hawkers selling unhealthy snacks like Cimol, cilok, ice, meatball skewers, and assorted toys in front of the school, resulting in nearly 20 primary schools where there are sellers at the gate of the school. This pattern is one reason why the researchers think the school children continue to prefer to eat unhealthy foods.

The first intervention was Health education with media flipchart and booklet with a time of 100 minutes in the classroom, where the children are invited to play with puzzles to match pictures and writing about food items and healthy ingredients.

Table 1 provides analysis of data correlation between the work of the father, mother occupation, the influence of others, the influence of media information on the level of knowledge of children and the results showed no correlation between knowledge and attitudes of healthy food.

3.2 Knowledge and attitudes of healthy food

Table 2 described the respondents' answers to the questionnaires pretest and posttest about health education. The questionnaires have four indicators, namely food nutrients, function of nutrients, objectives of physical activities and examples of physical activities. Difference between the tests' results before and after the Health education was given was $10.47 \pm 2.9\%$ increased to $12.35 \pm 2.6\%$ showing a significant difference (p < .0001).

Table 3 described the results of the answers about the respondents' attitudes. There are five indicators that were asked about: 1) The necessity to eat a variety of foods; 2) The importance of the composition of the food; 3) Sufficient supply of water; 4) The importance of food intake for growth and development factors; and 5) Consumption of side dishes of high protein, and restriction of sugary-salty-fatty foods. Results of the effect of health education on children's attitudes about healthy foods show that there are differences in median percent measuring attitudes about healthy eating among school-age children before and after health education, where before health education 27.98 with a mean changing to 29.04 with (p < .001) after, the health education.

	Answer of Pre-Test Results				Answer of Post-Test Results				Before	After	-	
Indicators	True		False		True	True			(Mean ±	(Mean ±	t	р
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	SD)	SD)		
Food nutrients	160.8	47.5	177.2	52.4	191.4	56.6	146.6	43.3	10.47 ± 2.9	$12.35 \hspace{0.2cm} \pm \hspace{0.2cm} 2.6 \hspace{0.2cm}$	10.216	< .001
Function of nutrients	79.4	23.4	258.6	76.5	100.4	29.7	237.4	70.2				
The food be restricted	293	86.7	45	13.3	307	90.8	31	9.2				
Drinks be restricted	236	69.8	102	30.2	262	77.5	76	22.5				
Grateful for food	298	88.2	40	11.8	317	93.8	21	6.2				
An additional material for food	270	79.9	68	20.1	296	87.6	42	12.4				
Objective of breakfast	272	80.5	66	19.5	310	91.7	28	8.3				
Sufficient water	154	45.6	184	54.4	251	74.3	87	25.7				
Importance of label	241	71.3	97	28.7	270	79.9	68	20.1				
Wash hands Function	220	65.1	118	34.9	258	76.3	80	23.7				
Objective of physical activity	128	37.9	210	62.1	183	54.1	155	45.9				
Examples of physical activity	210	62.1	128	37.9	247	73.1	91	26.9				

Table 2. Table of knowledge questionnaire answer before and after health education (n = 338)

Table 3. Frequency distribution of the questionnaire answers students' attitudes about healthy foods before and after intervention (n = 338)

Indicators	Result	Results of Attitudes Questionnaire Answers-Pre & Posttest										
	Disagree		Not sure		Agree		Strongly agree		Attitude		z	р
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Before	After		r
	(n)	(n)	(n)	(n)	(n)	(n)	(n)	(n)	Delore			
The necessity to try a variety of foods	44	51	127	157	142	111	25	19	27.98	29.04	-4.25	< .001
The importance of composition from the food	98	106	130	121	66	57	44	54	28	29		
Sufficient of water	154	76	184	157	251	78	87	27				
The food intake is important for growing children	95	64	148	152	56	85	39	37				
Consumption of side dishes high protein	98	63	130	56	77	90	33	129				
Restriction of sugary foods, salty and fatty foods	84		76		90		88					

The second intervention of this study involved conducting a cooking competition between groups. Respondents were invited to prepare a breakfast menu of fried vegetable and rice dishes and sandwiches. Researchers provided a cash prize of compensation of IDR 20,000 (\sim 2\$ USD) for the one winning group. Cooking stuffs and equipment were prepared by the participants. This cooking competition was attended by all 36 groups of 20 elementary schools at Cangkringan district who participated in this study. The cooking competition was done in the pavilion area of the village hall at Argomulyo. Students looked very enthusiastic about cooking, producing

a variety of processed menu items, which were enjoyed by all as expressed by the participants and their parents and school teachers. At the time of the assessment process students were invited to present the results of their cooking to the jury including detailed expenses for the food, types of processing and sorts of the content of nutrients contained in the food that had been cooked.

4. **DISCUSSION**

There are various ways of promoting health education for school-age children that were implemented in this study. Our

study demonstrated that active learning through 'learning with fun approach' using a cooking class and booklet as learning media and small working groups, may increase participation of learning the importance of healthier meals for elementary school students and thus make learning become more real and meaningful for them. This educational method is previously proved to increase the knowledge and attitudes of children about healthy food intake.^[8]

Flipcharts are a practical media for providing educational material, which can be done simply and does not need complicated strategies, nor any electricity when using it.^[17] The advantages here are booklets can be stored longer, can be read back during leisure time, and the reader also can adjust and learn independently.^[18] The booklet is also a media for nurses to provide information about healthy food for their patients who are the school age children.^[19]

Activities outside the classroom served to promote the psychomotor ability of the children, helping them to be able independently to prepare a healthy breakfast.^[20] Breakfast is a very important meal for everybody to start the day with adequate nutrition and therefore children who eat a complete breakfast compared to a partial one, make fewer mistakes and work faster in math and number checking tests.^[21] Children who eat breakfast also show improved cognitive function, attention, and memory.^[22]

School-age children in this mountainous Indonesian area after the volcanic disaster have been accustomed to eat food instant food, so there have been daily consumption patterns that are not healthy. This pattern is reflected in the behavior of children with the consumption of instant noodles, canned fish consumption as a side dish, and eating unhealthy snack food while in school. In this study, knowledge and attitudes have increased significantly, before and after intervention through a fun approach to healthy food. Through the learning process the participants can better understand that the homemade food is better, and healthier than any food from the foodstalls.^[16]

Community nurses are expected to provide education for school age children including how to prepare and consume healthy food. As nurses and medical educators, we recommended that the healthy food intake should be embedded in the basic curriculum of elementary school, and become a part of the 'living skills' subject. The results of this study provide feedback that primary school children should be able to recognize and prepare food for daily consumption, thus further providing a model that can improve health status of all children.^[23]

5. CONCLUSIONS

Health education for school aged children with active learning methods using a booklet, flip chart and cooking competition was useful to supplement knowledge and positive attitudes of the students to select a more healthy daily food intake.

6. IMPLICATION FOR NURSING EDUCATION

There are essential roles for nurses who serve the community to provide more attention to promote health food intake for school age children. An engaging 'learning with fun' approach is needed to introduce healthy food intake for school age children. Creativity of nurses to design learning experiences, which involve school age children to actively participate in the learning courses, should be encouraged.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all school-age children who have been willing to participate in this study, and thanks to educators and all research assistants to assist throughout this study.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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