AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF INTERACTIVE NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAMS ON CHILDREN'S BASIC NUTRITION KNOWLEDGE

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BACKGROUND

Children in the United States are not meeting the dietary recommendations set forth in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Obesity rates in children are on a steady incline, leading to many chronic diseases including diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Schools are imperative in the promotion of healthy dietary patterns among students, and American children only receive approximately 8 of the 40-50 hours of nutrition education necessary to facilitate behavior change. Nutrition education is necessary to empower children to make choices that promote health and wellness.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this quasi-experimental research project was to determine if an interactive nutrition education program enhances children's knowledge of basic nutrition, specifically dietary recommendations for fruits, vegetables, dairy, and whole grains.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A pre-test, post-test design was utilized with 27 4th and 5th grade children who attend Judson Fundamental Elementary School in Shreveport, Louisiana, and are 4-H members of their local club. Following completion of a pre-questionnaire, an interactive nutrition education program including a 15-minute guided discussion and a trivia game (Nutrition Jeopardy) was provided followed by a post-questionnaire on the basic nutrition topics previously described. Outcome measures included: (1) Student knowledge of nutrition will be measured with a pretest and by engaging in conversation with the researchers and classmates about a few of the nutrition topics from the pre-test, (2) students will be able to identify serving sizes for fruit, vegetables, grains, water, and dairy by the end of the intervention, (3) students will be able to identify different types of fruits and vegetables by the end of the intervention, and (4) Students will be able to discuss the recommended number of daily servings for fruits, vegetables, dairy, and whole grains. These skills will be learned during the Nutrition Jeopardy game. Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate results.

RESULTS

Comparison of Children's Correct Answers Before and After Interactive Nutrition Intervention Program
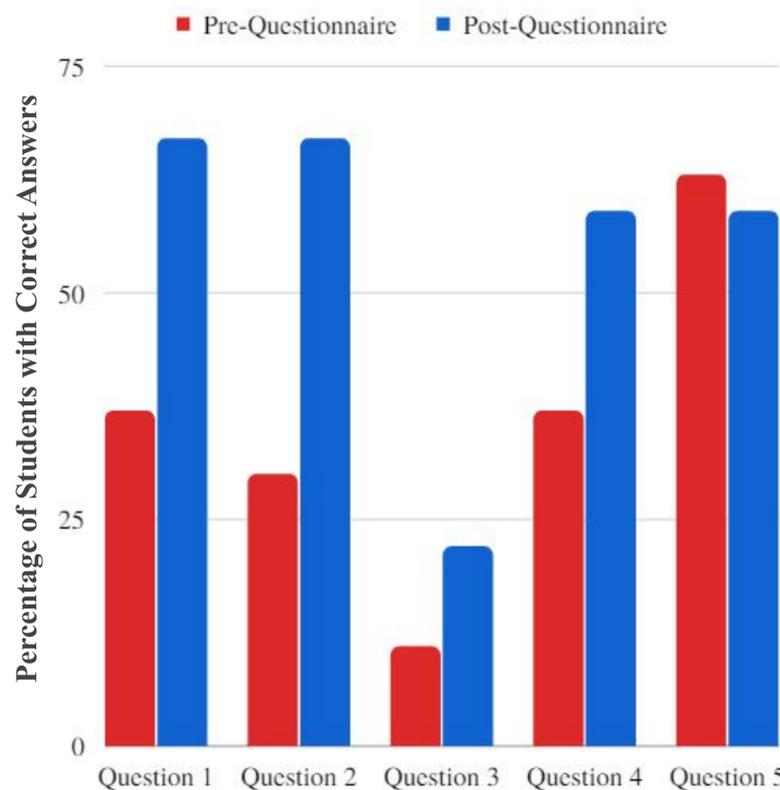
Over 90% of the 27 participants responded with positive written feedback regarding the program. For the majority of the basic nutrition topics included in the interactive nutrition education program (fruits, vegetables, dairy, and whole grains), the percentage of correct answers by students increased by as much as 125%. However, scores decreased by 6% in one category (water). This may be due to a lack of emphasis on this particular topic during program implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study indicate that interactive nutrition education programs may increase children's knowledge of basic nutrition, specifically perceived dietary recommendations of fruits, vegetables, dairy, and whole grains.

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