

Household food waste prevention - Can experiential learning be used as a tool for reduction?

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Abstract

1. Introduction

Food waste is a multifaceted issue that affects the environment (emissions, pollution, land use etc.), food management systems (all stages of the food chain) and society (food insecurity, hunger). In Greece, according to the EU Statistics in 2020, household food waste was reported at 87 kg/inh./year (Eurostat, 2022), of which 40 kg are considered to be avoidable food waste (Lasaridi, 2022).

Youths are a key stakeholder for a sustainable environment on the other hand the WRAP - Food waste trends survey 2021, the age group that produces most avoidable food waste is between 18 and 34 years of age.

The target of the study was to investigate whether experiential learning can stimulate pro-environmental behaviour for household food waste prevention among young people in Greece. Experiential learning according to Kolb (1984, p. 21) is “a holistic, integrative perspective on learning, that combines experience, perception, cognition and behaviour”.

2. Materials and Method

In this study, a combination of methods (i.e. questionnaire) and approaches (i.e. focus group, experiential learning) have been used targeting to investigate the Greek youths' theoretical knowledge regarding: a) awareness on the food waste problem, b) the impacts (environmental, economic, and social) of food waste and c) food waste prevention methods. Experiential learning was used as an intervention to provide skills for household food waste prevention.

The participants were six in total (male and female), between 19 and 21 years old university students, living with their parents. The research used the focus group method (Gill et al., 2008), as the participants belonged to the same age group, had the same educational background, studied at the same university and the same subject.

3. Data collection

The data collection consisted of four phases, starting with a questionnaire and a focus group, thereafter the intervention and finally a second focus group.

2. Results discussion

The data from the four different phases were analysed separately using thematic analysis method, as described by Braun and Clark (2006, p.79).

During focus groups food waste was discussed, where the misconceptions, and

misunderstandings relevant to what is food waste surfaced. As it has been identified by Abeliotis et al. (2016). The participants sources of information on food waste are the awareness campaigns, the internet, while parents and family play a significant role in consumption habits and environmental behaviour (Grønhøj and Thøgersen, 2012).

Youths' theoretical knowledge and understanding on food waste was satisfactory. During the intervention were addressed the issues raised during the focus group while working together for cooking a full meal. This was practical knowledge was gained, giving confidence and reassurance to the participants and a feeling of becoming part of the solution. As it is identified by Visschers et al. (2015) skills training can promote pro-environmental behaviour.

5. Conclusion

For successful food waste prevention the following conditions need to be met a) awareness on the subject b) awareness of the personal responsibility c) theoretical knowledge, and d) practical knowledge/ cooking skills. Experiential learning can be used as a tool through which to stimulate youths to adopt pro-environmental behaviour for food waste prevention.

6. References

Keywords: Food waste prevention, SDG's, experiential learning

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