



Trend and Pattern of Fast-Food Consumption among Students of Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu

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ABSTRACT

Fast-food consumption is rising among young adults in Nigerian tertiary institutions, yet evidence from colleges of education, which train the teachers who will shape the dietary knowledge of future pupils, remains thin. This study examined the trend and pattern of fast-food consumption among students of Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu, Nigeria. A descriptive cross-sectional survey was used. A sample of 361 students was drawn by proportionate stratified random sampling, and 342 correctly completed questionnaires (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$) were analysed with frequencies, percentages, means, and the chi-square test at the .05 level. Of the students, 95.9% consumed fast food and 56.4% did so three or more times a week. Instant noodles (82.6%), meat pies and pastries (75.0%), carbonated soft drinks (72.9%), and restaurant-prepared rice dishes (65.2%) were the most common items. Fast food most often replaced breakfast (40.2%) and lunch (36.9%). Intake had increased since admission for 57.0% of consumers, and frequent consumption rose from 45.2% in the first year to 68.9% in the final year. Convenience, academic workload, and taste were the strongest drivers. Frequent consumption was associated with gender, level of study, and place of residence. Campus nutrition education, vendor regulation, and affordable healthy meals are recommended.

Keywords: *fast food, dietary pattern, college of education students, nutrition transition, Enugu, Nigeria*

1. Introduction

Food choices made in early adulthood tend to persist, and the years spent in tertiary education are a period in which many young people take full responsibility for their own diets for the first time. In Nigeria, as in many low- and middle-income countries, this transition is taking place against a broader nutrition transition in which traditional diets based on minimally processed staples are being displaced by energy-dense, highly processed foods that are cheap to produce, heavily marketed, and convenient to eat (Popkin et al., 2012). Fast food, prepared and served quickly, sold ready to eat, and typically high in refined carbohydrates, fat, salt, and added sugar, sits at the centre of this shift. Many of these items are ultra-processed foods, industrial formulations of refined ingredients and additives rather than modified whole foods (Monteiro et al., 2019).

The health consequences of habitual fast-food consumption are well documented. In the 15-year Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults (CARDIA) study, young adults who ate at fast-food restaurants more than twice a week gained more weight and developed greater insulin resistance than those who ate there less than once a week (Pereira et al., 2005). A systematic review concluded that fast-food consumption is associated with higher total energy intake and a trajectory towards weight gain and obesity (Rosenheck, 2008). These findings matter in Nigeria, where a meta-analysis of 35 studies estimated the pooled prevalence of overweight and obesity among adults at 25.0% and 14.3% respectively (Adeloye et al., 2021), and where an earlier review reported rising but regionally variable excess weight (Chukwuonye et al., 2013). The World Health Organization (2020) has advised limiting free sugars, salt, and industrially produced fats, all of which are concentrated in typical fast-food menus.

Nigerian studies have shown that fast food is an established part of student life. Among undergraduates of the University of Ibadan, consumption was common and had clear implications for nutrition education (Arulogun



& Owolabi, 2011). Fast foods also made a meaningful contribution to daily nutrient intake among Nigerian university students (Afolabi et al., 2013). At Obafemi Awolowo University, Bakare and Olumakaiye (2016) linked the pattern among 360 students in halls of residence to body weight status. At Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Oladimeji et al. (2017) found that about half of students' food expenditure went on fast food, with snacks, instant noodles, and fried rice the most consumed items. Among Lagos undergraduates, Olatona et al. (2018) documented unhealthy dietary habits alongside emerging metabolic risk factors.

Most of this evidence comes from universities in the south-west and north. Comparatively little is known about colleges of education, and less still about institutions in the South-East. Colleges of education deserve attention because their graduates become primary and junior secondary teachers who model and teach dietary behaviour to children. Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu (ESCET), is in an urban setting where roadside vendors, campus kiosks, branded quick-service restaurants, and online delivery services are within easy reach. Informal observation suggests that many students rely on these outlets, but there is no systematic evidence on how often they eat fast food, what they eat, when and where they eat it, whether consumption changes as they progress, and what drives their choices.

1.1 Problem, purpose, and hypotheses

Students at ESCET live under conditions that may favour fast food: many reside in private off-campus hostels with limited cooking facilities, lecture timetables are demanding, and unreliable electricity makes home cooking difficult. Inflation in food prices may also have altered the relative cost of fast food and home-cooked meals. Without data on the trend and pattern of consumption, the College cannot design targeted nutrition education or regulate campus food provision. The problem of this study is the absence of empirical evidence on the frequency, types, timing, venues, trend, and determinants of fast-food consumption among ESCET students.

The study sought to determine the frequency of consumption, the types commonly consumed, the meal occasions, venues, and weekly expenditure, the trend since admission and across levels of study, and the factors that influence consumption. Three null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level. Frequent fast-food consumption is not significantly associated with gender (H01), level of study (H02), or place of residence (H03).

2. Literature review

The study was anchored on the theory of planned behaviour and the socio-ecological model. Behaviour is predicted by intention, which is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Favourable attitudes, such as beliefs that fast food is tasty and saves time, perceived peer approval, and the ease of obtaining fast food should increase consumption. Seo et al. (2011) applied the theory among students in Seoul and found that each component contributed to intention and behaviour. The socio-ecological model locates food choices in nested levels: individual factors such as taste and time, social environments such as peers, physical environments such as outlet proximity, and macro-level environments such as price, marketing, and policy (Story et al., 2008). Together the frameworks informed the factors examined, from personal preference to the campus food environment.

In this study, fast food means ready-to-eat food purchased from canteens, kiosks, roadside vendors, quick-service restaurants, or delivery services and eaten with little further preparation, together with instant noodles and sugar-sweetened carbonated drinks. Pattern refers to frequency, types, meal occasions, venues, and expenditure. Trend refers to the direction of change. Because the design is cross-sectional, trend was operationalised as self-reported change since admission and as differences in the proportion of frequent consumers across levels of study.

International evidence links fast food among young people to adverse weight outcomes. Among adolescent and young adult Saudi women in Riyadh, consumption was frequent and shaped by social activity and convenience (Alfaris et al., 2015). In Iran, fast-food consumption among students was associated with general and abdominal obesity (Mohammadbeigi et al., 2018). Belgian university students identified taste, time,

convenience, peers, availability, and price as the main determinants after the transition to university (Deliens et al., 2014). A narrative review of takeaway and fast-food consumption reached similar conclusions (Janssen et al., 2018).

Nigerian studies echo these patterns. Arulogun and Owolabi (2011) recommended targeted nutrition education at the University of Ibadan. Afolabi et al. (2013) showed that fast foods contributed substantially to energy and nutrient intake. Bakare and Olumakaiye (2016) examined consumption, gender, and body mass index in nine halls of residence. Oladimeji et al. (2017) found that time constraints, peer pressure, and convenience were the main reasons at Ahmadu Bello University, and that age, sex, time away from hostels, and distance to eating places influenced both the decision and the level of consumption. Olatona et al. (2018) reported frequent snacking among Lagos undergraduates alongside metabolic risk factors. Almost all of this evidence concerns universities rather than colleges of education, little of it is from the South-East, and few studies examine change across levels of study.

3. Methods

A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted at Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu, a state-owned institution in Enugu metropolis that runs Nigeria Certificate in Education programmes in technical, vocational, science, and general education. The campus and its surroundings host food kiosks, canteens, and roadside vendors, and the metropolis contains branded restaurants and online delivery services. The population comprised students enrolled in NCE programmes during the 2025/2026 session, estimated at about 6,000 across three levels. The sample of 361 followed the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. Proportionate stratified random sampling was used, first by school and then by level (NCE I, II, and III).

Data were collected with the researcher-developed Fast-Food Consumption Trend and Pattern Questionnaire, adapted from earlier instruments (Bakare & Olumakaiye, 2016; Oladimeji et al., 2017). Section A covered gender, age, level, residence, and monthly allowance. Section B measured weekly frequency, types, meals replaced, usual venue, and weekly expenditure. Section C asked whether consumption had increased, remained unchanged, or decreased since admission. Section D contained nine influence items rated from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (4). Three experts, two in Home Economics education and one in measurement and evaluation, validated the instrument. A trial with 30 students of a comparable college outside the study area gave Cronbach's alpha of .82 for Section D. Questionnaires were administered by hand during lecture-free periods. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Of 361 copies, 342 were usable (94.7%).

Frequencies and percentages answered the descriptive questions. Means and standard deviations were used for influences, with a criterion mean of 2.50. Respondents who consumed fast food three or more times a week were classified as frequent consumers. The chi-square test of independence tested the hypotheses, and Cramér's V was reported as the effect size.

4. Results

Females made up 59.4% of the sample, and 48.8% were aged 21 to 25 years. The three levels were represented in similar proportions. Almost half (48.0%) lived in private off-campus hostels, and 43.3% received a monthly allowance of ₦30,000 to ₦60,000.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 342)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	139	40.6
	Female	203	59.4
Age (years)	16–20	118	34.5
	21–25	167	48.8
	26 and above	57	16.7
Level of study	NCE I	124	36.3

	NCE II	112	32.7
	NCE III	106	31.0
Residence	On-campus hostel	97	28.4
	Off-campus private hostel	164	48.0
	With parents or relatives	81	23.7
Monthly allowance	Below ₦30,000	129	37.7
	₦30,000–₦60,000	148	43.3
	Above ₦60,000	65	19.0

Note. Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

Only 4.1% never consumed fast food, so 95.9% were consumers. The modal frequency was three to four times a week (31.9%). Altogether, 193 students (56.4%) ate fast food three or more times a week, and 9.6% ate it daily.

Table 2. Frequency of fast-food consumption in a typical week ($N = 342$)

Frequency	n	%	Cumulative %
Never	14	4.1	4.1
Less than once a week	38	11.1	15.2
1–2 times a week	97	28.4	43.6
3–4 times a week	109	31.9	75.4
5–6 times a week	51	14.9	90.4
Daily	33	9.6	100.0

Among the 328 consumers, instant noodles were the most common item (82.6%), followed by meat pies, sausage rolls, and similar pastries (75.0%), carbonated soft drinks (72.9%), and restaurant-prepared fried or jollof rice with chicken (65.2%). Burgers, hot dogs, and pizza, items associated with branded Western-style outlets, were consumed by comparatively few students.

Table 3. Types of fast food consumed ($n = 328$)

Type of fast food	n	%	Rank
Instant noodles	271	82.6	1
Meat pie, sausage roll, and pastries	246	75.0	2
Carbonated soft drinks	239	72.9	3
Fried or jollof rice with chicken	214	65.2	4
Shawarma	198	60.4	5
Doughnuts and puff-puff	176	53.7	6
Fried chicken (quick-service)	142	43.3	7
Burgers and hot dogs	87	26.5	8
Pizza	61	18.6	9

Note. Multiple responses were allowed. Percentages are based on the 328 consumers.

Fast food most frequently replaced breakfast (40.2%) and lunch (36.9%), both of which fall within the lecture day. Campus canteens and kiosks were the main source (42.4%), followed by roadside vendors near the campus (29.6%). Branded quick-service restaurants accounted for 18.6% and online delivery for 9.5%. The largest group (43.6%) spent ₦3,000 to ₦6,000 a week on fast food.

Table 4. Meal occasions, venues, and weekly expenditure ($n = 328$)

Variable	Category	n	%
Meal replaced	Breakfast	132	40.2
	Lunch	121	36.9
	Dinner	49	14.9
	Snack between meals	26	7.9
Usual venue	Campus canteen or kiosk	139	42.4
	Roadside vendor near campus	97	29.6
	Branded quick-service	61	18.6

	restaurant		
	Online food delivery	31	9.5
Weekly expenditure	Below ₦3,000	108	32.9
	₦3,000–₦6,000	143	43.6
	Above ₦6,000	77	23.5

More than half of the consumers (57.0%) reported that intake had increased since admission, compared with 14.3% who reported a decrease. The proportion of frequent consumers rose from 45.2% in NCE I to 57.1% in NCE II and 68.9% in NCE III.

Table 5. Indicators of trend in fast-food consumption

Indicator	Category	n	%
Change since admission (n = 328)	Increased	187	57.0
	Unchanged	94	28.7
	Decreased	47	14.3
Frequent consumers	NCE I (n = 124)	56	45.2
	NCE II (n = 112)	64	57.1
	NCE III (n = 106)	73	68.9

Note. Frequent consumers ate fast food three or more times a week. Lower-panel percentages are within each level.

Seven of the nine factors met the criterion mean of 2.50. Convenience and time saving ($M = 3.41$), a tight lecture schedule and academic workload ($M = 3.27$), and taste and variety ($M = 3.18$) were rated highest, followed by lack of cooking facilities or electricity ($M = 3.06$) and proximity of vendors ($M = 2.97$). Peer influence and social media advertising were also endorsed. Students did not agree that fast food was cheaper than home cooking ($M = 2.46$) or that it conferred social status ($M = 2.12$).

Table 6. Mean ratings of factors influencing fast-food consumption ($N = 342$)

Factor	M	SD	Decision
Convenience and time saving	3.41	0.68	Agree
Tight lecture schedule and academic workload	3.27	0.74	Agree
Taste and variety	3.18	0.79	Agree
Lack of cooking facilities or electricity	3.06	0.88	Agree
Proximity of food vendors to campus	2.97	0.83	Agree
Peer influence and socialising	2.84	0.91	Agree
Advertising and social media promotion	2.58	0.97	Agree
Fast food is cheaper than home cooking	2.46	0.95	Disagree
Eating fast food confers social status	2.12	1.02	Disagree

Note. Criterion mean = 2.50. Grand mean = 2.88.

Frequent consumption was associated with gender, $\chi^2(1, N = 342) = 4.50$, $p = .034$, with a higher proportion of males (63.3%) than females (51.7%) classified as frequent consumers. It was also associated with level of study, $\chi^2(2, N = 342) = 13.10$, $p = .001$, and with place of residence, $\chi^2(2, N = 342) = 17.02$, $p < .001$. Students in on-campus hostels (66.0%) and off-campus private hostels (60.4%) were more likely to be frequent consumers than those living with parents or relatives (37.0%). Effect sizes were small to moderate (Cramér's $V = .12$ to $.22$). All three null hypotheses were rejected.

Table 7. Association of demographic variables with frequent fast-food consumption

Variable	Frequent n (%)	χ^2	p	V
Male (n = 139)	88 (63.3)	4.50	.034	.12
Female (n = 203)	105 (51.7)			
NCE I (n = 124)	56 (45.2)	13.10	.001	.20
NCE II (n = 112)	64 (57.1)			
NCE III (n = 106)	73 (68.9)			
On-campus hostel (n = 97)	64 (66.0)	17.02	< .001	.22
Off-campus hostel (n = 164)	99 (60.4)			



With parents or relatives (n = 81)	30 (37.0)			
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Note. Frequent consumption = three or more times a week. V = Cramér's V. df = 1 for gender and 2 for level and residence.

5. Discussion

Almost all ESCET students consumed fast food, and more than half did so at least three times a week. Fast food has become a routine rather than an occasional part of student diets. This agrees with earlier Nigerian studies (Afolabi et al., 2013; Arulogun & Owolabi, 2011; Bakare & Olumakaiye, 2016) and with international studies of young people (Alfaris et al., 2015; Mohammadbeigi et al., 2018). Given the links with higher energy intake, weight gain, and insulin resistance (Pereira et al., 2005; Rosenheck, 2008), and the national burden of overweight and obesity (Adeloye et al., 2021), the level of consumption observed here is a public health concern.

The most popular items were instant noodles, pastries, soft drinks, and restaurant-prepared rice dishes, while burgers and pizza were consumed by relatively few students. This mirrors Oladimeji et al. (2017), where snacks, instant noodles, and fried rice predominated. For many Nigerian students, fast food means inexpensive, locally available, ultra-processed or refined foods rather than branded international products (Monteiro et al., 2019). The heavy consumption of carbonated soft drinks is notable given advice to limit free sugars (World Health Organization, 2020).

Fast food most commonly replaced breakfast and lunch and was obtained mainly from campus canteens, kiosks, and nearby roadside vendors. The campus food environment is the primary setting in which these habits are formed, consistent with the socio-ecological emphasis on physical environments (Story et al., 2008). The small but noticeable share using online delivery is an emerging channel. Most consumers reported that intake had increased since admission, and the proportion of frequent consumers rose from under half in NCE I to over two-thirds in NCE III. The cross-sectional design means the level comparison reflects different cohorts, but both indicators point the same way: consumption appears to intensify as students progress. This is consistent with the observation that the transition to tertiary education disrupts established eating habits (Deliens et al., 2014). Intervention is needed early and should be sustained across all levels.

Convenience, academic workload, and taste were the strongest drivers, followed by barriers to cooking and vendor proximity. These results agree with Deliens et al. (2014), Janssen et al. (2018), and Oladimeji et al. (2017), and they map onto the theory of planned behaviour: favourable attitudes, perceived ease of buying fast food relative to cooking, and peer norms all favour consumption (Ajzen, 1991; Seo et al., 2011). The rejection of affordability as a reason is noteworthy. Students do not regard fast food as cheaper than cooking; they buy it because it saves time and effort. Price-based interventions alone may be less effective than measures that make healthy food equally convenient.

The higher rate among males is consistent with earlier Nigerian findings (Bakare & Olumakaiye, 2016; Oladimeji et al., 2017). The strongest association was with residence: students living with parents or relatives were much less likely to be frequent consumers than those in hostels, which underlines the protective effect of home-cooked meals (Story et al., 2008). Because ESCET trains future teachers, the findings extend beyond the students themselves. Teachers who habitually replace breakfast and lunch with instant noodles, pastries, and soft drinks may be poorly placed to model healthy eating. Practical nutrition education in general studies, and demonstrations of quick nutritious meals in Home Economics, could carry benefits into the schools where graduates will teach.

The study relied on self-report, which may be affected by recall and social desirability. Differences across levels reflect different cohorts. Anthropometry and nutrient intake were not measured. A cohort followed from admission to graduation, with body mass index and dietary recall, and comparison across colleges in the South-East, would strengthen the evidence.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

Fast-food consumption among students of Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu, is widespread, frequent, and higher at later levels of study. It is dominated by instant noodles, pastries, soft drinks, and rice dishes, mainly replaces breakfast and lunch, and takes place largely in the campus food environment. Convenience, academic workload, taste, and limited cooking facilities are the main drivers. Male students, students at higher levels, and students living in hostels are the most likely frequent consumers. Effective responses must address the campus food environment as well as individual knowledge.

The College should introduce a compulsory, practical nutrition component in general studies, with emphasis on breakfast and quick healthy meals. Management, working with the health centre, should register, inspect, and train campus vendors, and should require canteens to offer affordable balanced meals, fruit, and water alongside conventional fast food. Because convenience rather than cost drives consumption, vendors should provide ready-to-eat healthy meals at lecture times, and timetables should allow adequate meal breaks. Hostel managers should provide safe shared cooking spaces and, where possible, alternative power. Student unions and the Department of Home Economics should organise peer-led campaigns, including on social media, aimed at male students and those in higher levels.

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