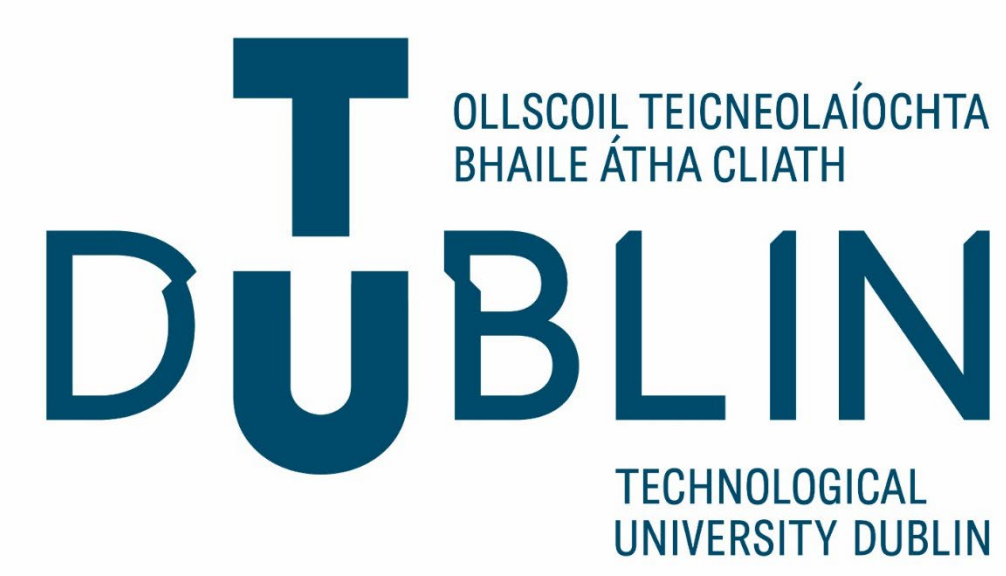
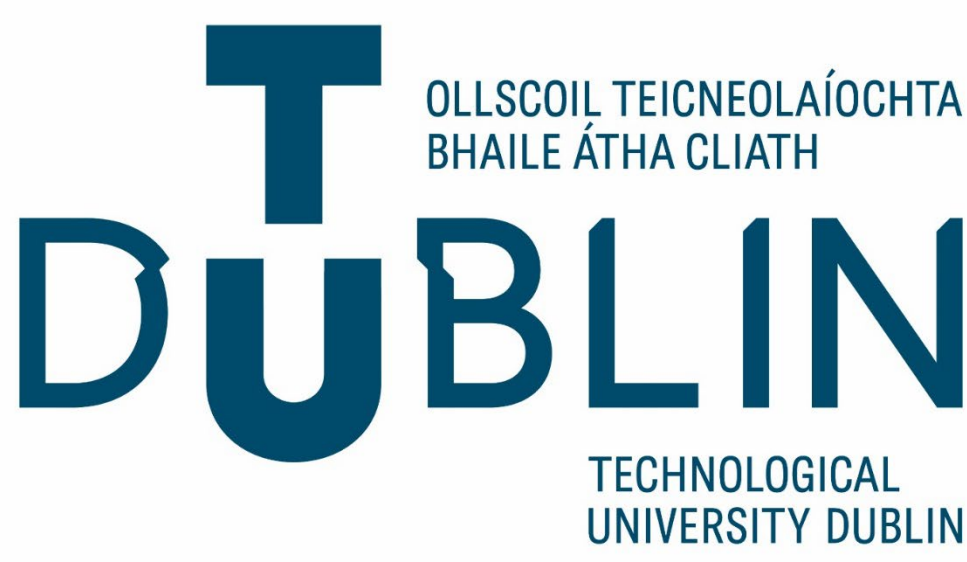


Students' Perceptions of Food Sustainability Education on Nutrition & Dietetic Programmes in Ireland



Aileen Kennedy PhD

School of Biological, Health and Sports Sciences,
Technological University Dublin, City Campus, Ireland



liz.osullivan@tudublin.ie, aileen.x.kennedy@tudublin.ie

BACKGROUND

- Nutrition and dietetic professionals can play a crucial role in promoting food sustainability by advocating for healthy and sustainable food choices and practices.
- Global evidence suggests that behaviour change is best accomplished when education is accompanied by policies that enable individuals to make and maintain healthy choices across their lifespan.
- However, research has shown that many Dietitians report having a lack of knowledge and confidence, or the resources needed to help their clients eat more sustainably.
- This low professional confidence and a perceived lack of competence can create barriers to integrating sustainability into dietetic practice.
- Dietetics & Nutrition Educators have an important role in improving students' understanding of sustainability in context of nutrition and human health as the future workforce within the profession.
- Dietetics & Nutrition Educators must stride to meet SDG target 4.7 which requires educators ensure that *“all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development”* by 2030 (UN, 2015).

AIM

The aim of this study is to explore nutrition and dietetic students' perceptions of sustainability education currently provided with the Republic of Ireland; their role in promoting food sustainability, and finally their confidence in discussing sustainable diets as a future professional.

METHODS

- Online questionnaire using MS Forms was developed with 3 sections demographic questions, knowledge questions, and attitudes & confident questions, containing a total of 39 questions.
- Students registered on a dietetic programme or an AfN accredited Programme in the Republic of Ireland were invited to take party in the study. The questionnaire was circulated among students on these courses and circulated on social media sites.
- The data was analysed using SPSS and was summarised using descriptive statistics.
- This research received ethical approval from TU Dublin Research Ethics Committee.

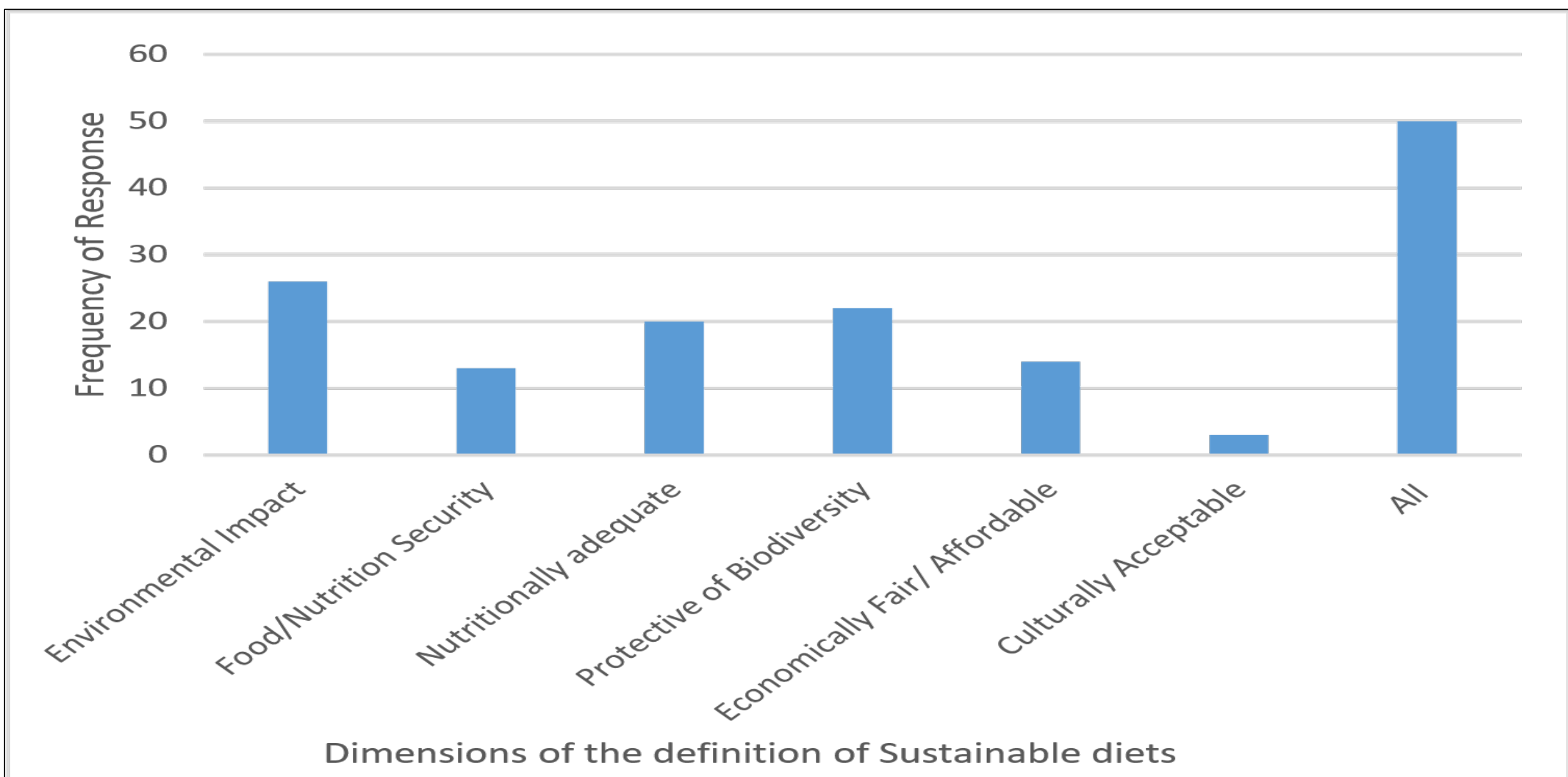
RESULTS

The sample consists of 80 participants; 51 students studying an AfN accredited Nutrition Programme & 29 studying Dietetics in Ireland.

Characteristic	N (%)
Gender	
Female	76 (95)
Male	4 (5)
Age	
18-21 years	50 (62.5)
22-25 years	24 (30.0)
>25 years	6 (7.5)
Program of Study	
Nutrition Programme	51 (63.75)
Dietetics Programme	29 (36.25)
Year of Study	
1st-2nd Year	37 (46.25)
3rd -4th year	39 (48.75)
Postgraduate	4 (5.0)
Knowledge of the Environmental Impacts of Food	Mean (SD)
Dietetics	10.8 (3.0)
Nutrition	10.7 (3.1)

RESULTS

Figure 1: Frequency of responses to the question “I consider a sustainable diet to be ...?” Respondents were given 7 options which covered the 6 dimensions of FAO (2010) definition of sustainable diets and an additional option of All. Respondents could pick more than one answer.



- While most students have a good understanding of sustainable diets, some students did not consider the more holistic aspects of sustainable diets such as culturally acceptable and food security.

Table 2. Student Dietitians & Nutritionist perceptions of (i) their role in promoting food sustainability, (ii) their confidence in discussing sustainable diets and (iii) how well sustainability is embedded in their curriculum currently.

In your future as a Dietitian, how important do you see your role in promoting food sustainability? (n)				
Extremely important	Somewhat imp	Neutral	Somewhat not important	Extremely not important
27.6% (8)	55.2% (16)	7.2% (5)	0	0
In your future as a Nutritionist, how important do you see your role in promoting food sustainability? (n)				
Extremely important	Somewhat imp	Neutral	Somewhat not important	Extremely not important
54% (27)	30% (15)	10% (5)	4% (2)	2% (1)
Upon completion of your dietetic course, how confident would you feel discussing sustainable diets? (n)				
Extremely confident	Somewhat confident	Neutral	Somewhat not confident	Extremely not confident
3.4(1)	20.7(6)	20.7(6)	37.9(11)	17.2(5)
Upon completion of your Nutrition course, how confident would you feel discussing sustainable diets? (n)				
Extremely confident	Somewhat confident	Neutral	Somewhat not confident	Extremely not confident
6.0(3)	34.0 (17)	4.0 (12)	34.0 (17)	2.0 (1)
How well do you think food sustainability is embedded into the curriculum of your dietetic programme? (n)				
Extremely Well	Somewhat Well	Neutral	Somewhat Not Well	Extremely Not Well
0	6.9(2)	34.5 (10)	31.0 (9)	27.6 (8)
How well do you think food sustainability is embedded into the curriculum of your nutrition programme? (n)				
Extremely Well	Somewhat Well	Neutral	Somewhat Not Well	Extremely Not Well
0	40% (20)	26% (13)	30% (15)	4% (2)

- 54% of nutrition students & 27.6% of dietetic students reported that promoting sustainably will be “extremely important” in their future career.
- However, less than a ¼ of dietetic students and 40% of nutrition students reported that they would feel confident in discussing sustainable diets with the public upon graduation.
- Most students (n=76) reported wanting food sustainability to be better integrated into the curriculum, with most thinking food sustainability is not embedded well into the curriculum.

KEY FINDINGS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Our findings have highlighted that Irish D&N students reported feeling not confident in discussing sustainable diets with the public upon graduation with their current knowledge.
- This study showed there is a demand among D&N students for the integration of food sustainability into programme curricula. The call for change in the curricula has been clear and consistent in the literature for years and by the United Nations and now by students.
- Future Dietitians and Nutritionist will need skills in the area of sustainable diets to be leaders in this area to make positive impacts on the population and planet.
- However, this can be difficult in an already overburdened curriculum
- If this is to be driven within the profession, we must develop the core competencies needed for the profession to ensure a deep level of understanding and incorporate them into regulatory and accreditation bodies for these programmes.