

Food Shopping and Food Coping Strategy in Gen-Z College Students

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Submitted August 21, 2025 ; Approved August 28, 2025

ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Gen-Z college students are in a transitional phase towards economic independence, making financial management a significant challenge, especially for food needs. Budget limitations and social influences, such as peer habits, often encourage students to choose cheap, less nutritious food, which can have a negative impact on their health and well-being. This study examines pocket money allocation patterns, food coping strategies, and the relationship between pocket money, spending, and food coping strategies. By understanding these dynamics, the research is expected to provide insights to support food security policies and improve student welfare.

METHODS

This research uses the library research method. Library study is a research approach conducted by collecting information and data from various literature sources relevant to the topic of food coping strategies and food expenditure of university students, such as documents, books, articles, journals, and other materials available in the library.

FINDINGS

Discover how economic and social factors affect the consumption patterns of university students in more depth by summarizing previous research results that contain data collected from several research locations and various research subjects with different economic and social backgrounds. This research was created to understand the food coping strategies applied by university students and is expected to play a role in developing policy recommendations to support student food security and improve student welfare.

CONCLUSION

This literature review shows that students' pocket money allocation is influenced by culture, lifestyle, and financial limitations, which impact their food and non-food consumption patterns. Students with limited pocket money tend to reduce food expenditure using various coping strategies. Solutions can be implemented, including food subsidies, food aid, and financial literacy programs to help students manage their finances. However, further research is needed to assess these strategies' long-term impact and the policies' effectiveness in improving student welfare.

Keywords: Food; Gen-Z; Shopping; Strategies; Students

INTRODUCTION

Gen-Z students are transitioning from financial dependence on the family to economic independence (1). Financial management is a crucial aspect of meeting the needs of daily life, including food consumption. University students' main challenge is managing their budget efficiently, especially for food needs amid financial limitations. Consequently, they tend to choose cheap foods that are more practical but less nutritious (2). In addition, students' consumption patterns are also influenced by social and economic factors, including accessibility to food and the consumption habits of peers (3,4). Therefore, meeting balanced food needs remains a major challenge for university students.

Students' food shopping habits are shaped by economic, social, and cultural factors (5). Budget constraints, academic busyness, and lack of cooking facilities limit access to healthy food, leading to unbalanced food consumption patterns. Research shows that university students in various countries often choose fast or instant food as an affordable and accessible alternative, despite the long-term impact on their health (6). Social factors such as peer influence also play a role in determining the consumption patterns of university students, where they tend to conform to consumption trends in the neighborhood (7). This imbalance in food consumption can negatively impact on students' health in the long run, so this research can help design food policies for university students.

Economic limitations encourage students to adopt food coping strategies to meet their nutritional needs (8). These strategies include reducing the amount and quality of food consumed, sharing food with friends, finding free food, and working part-time to supplement their income. The food security of university students is an important issue, mainly because unhealthy consumption patterns can decrease academic performance and overall well-being (9). In addition, students' food coping strategies are also influenced by their income levels and the forms of social support they receive (10). Previous studies have primarily focused on food expenditure patterns or coping strategies separately, and very few have examined the combined relationship between pocket money, food, and non-food expenditures and coping strategies.

To address this gap, this study uses a systematic literature review to combine findings from different contexts, aiming to give a clearer understanding of the relationship between these variables. This study identifies students' food spending patterns, analyzes the food coping strategies applied, and looks at the relationship between pocket money, food and non-food expenditures, and the level of food coping strategies. With a deeper understanding, this research can provide insights for academics, policymakers, and educational institutions in designing more effective interventions to improve student welfare.

The novelty of this research highlights how economic and social factors affect the consumption patterns of university students in more depth by summarizing previous research results that contain data collected from several research locations and various research subjects with different economic and social backgrounds. Unlike previous research that examined these elements separately, this study offers a comprehensive perspective that can serve as a foundation for policy recommendations to support food security and enhance student well-being.

The objectives of this study include (a) identifying the allocation of pocket money for food and non-food expenditures, (b) examining students' food coping strategies, (c) examining the relationship between pocket money and food and non-food expenditures, and (d) examining the relationship between food and non-food expenditures and the level of students' food coping strategies. By understanding the factors that influence the food spending behavior of university students and the food coping strategies they apply, this study is expected to contribute to

improving food access for university students and ensure that this group can continue to meet their nutritional needs optimally despite financial limitations.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted in the province of Bali from November 2024 to March 2025 by collecting literature materials. The library research method is used in this research. Library study is a research approach conducted by gathering information and data from various relevant literature sources, such as documents, books, articles, journals, and other materials available in the library. This process involves systematic steps, such as preparing research tools and equipment, compiling a working bibliography, organizing time, and reading and recording important information to understand the research topic deeply (11,12). Thus, this method provides a strong theoretical basis and supports the analysis process in answering research problems (13). The literature study method used in this research provides a strong theoretical basis, allows in-depth analysis, and supports researchers in systematically and directed answering problems.

The stages carried out in this research included three main steps. First, the literature review is planned as a preliminary study to find data about research problems. This step involved a theoretical analysis of the problem under study, which is associated with the results of existing research and or the results of literature studies (14). This section explains the background of conducting a systematic literature review on food expenditure and coping strategies among university students, to identify students' food expenditure patterns, factors influencing pocket money management, and food coping strategies students apply to deal with food limitations. The need to conduct a literature review was determined by searching for relevant literature using scientific databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. This search was designed to find research on college students' food shopping, food coping strategies, and pocket money management. The researcher used certain keyword combinations and search term combining methods to ensure broad and relevant results, such as: Scopus: titles ("food coping strategy" or "college students' food expenditure" or "food insecurity") and ("college students' allowance allocation"); ScienceDirect: ((Title-Abstract-Keywords("food coping strategy") or Title-Abstract-Keywords("student food expenditure")) and (Title-Abstract-Keywords("food insecurity") or Title-Abstract-Keywords("student pocket money allocation"))); Google Scholar: (("food coping strategy" and "student food expenditure") or ("food insecurity" and "student pocket money allocation"))).

Second, a systematic literature review was conducted, and the selected literature was reviewed for relationships between variables. The main variables examined in this study were (a) allocation of pocket money, (b) food expenditure, (c) non-food expenditure, and (d) food coping strategies. These variables were examined based on definitions and classifications found in the selected literature to ensure consistency in interpretation. Research trends were analyzed based on the literature collected, showing that research on college students' food shopping demonstrates that financial constraints often influence their food-shopping decisions. For example, students tend to choose ready-to-eat foods or reduce consumption of certain foods as a form of austerity (3,15). This suggests that financial constraints affect students' consumption patterns, encouraging them to prioritize savings over the quality of food consumed. Evaluation of cross-country comparisons was also carried out. For example, research in the United States shows that university students often rely on government assistance programs such as food stamps to meet their food needs (16). In South Africa, students' food coping strategies are supported by social assistance and locally available food (10). The analysis technique used in

this study was descriptive and comparative, aiming to identify patterns, similarities, and differences across studies and contexts related to the topic.

Third, reporting a systematic literature review based on a systematic analysis of the reviewed literature. The articles analyzed were summarized to highlight key findings, such as food expenditure patterns, economic and social factors that influence food expenditure, and the impact of food coping strategies on student well-being (8,17). Various kinds of literature were combined to understand the relationship between research factors, such as pocket money, food expenditure, and how university students cope with food deprivation. From the analysis, for example, studies in the US and Kenya showed that college students experiencing food insecurity tend to choose food at low prices, even though these choices may negatively affect their health (18,19). Food insecurity in college students encourages prioritization of cost-efficiency in consumption, although it often results in a decrease in nutritional quality and health. This analysis was conducted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between financial conditions and coping behaviors among Gen-Z students, which can serve as the basis for policy recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Allocation of student pocket money for food and non-food expenses

To answer and outline the objectives in this subchapter, the authors collected and analyzed data obtained from the literature and previous studies relevant to the discussion of this research and based on a study written by Li entitled "Factors Influencing Students' Food Choices When Shopping for Food," which used surveys as a data collection technique, it was found that the average college student in China spends about 70% of their total pocket money on food expenses, including food in canteens, fast food, and fruits. Meanwhile, non-food expenditures, such as entertainment (karaoke), snacks, and social activities with friends, accounted for about 30% of the total allowance allocation, indicating that although food expenditures dominate, college students still allocate a portion of their allowance for social and entertainment needs (20). Another cross-sectional data collection study was distributed online to several universities in Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia. This study assessed students' spending behavior on non-food needs with a survey scale that measured how often students spent money on items other than food over the past 12 months, including purchasing alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, transportation, pet care, and tattoos. Response options were given on a 3-point scale, with total scores ranging from 8 to 24 points, where higher scores indicated more lavish spending on non-food items (16). These two studies show differences in students' pocket money allocation patterns, where students in China allocate more of their pocket money to food needs. In contrast, students in the United States tend to show more significant variation in spending on non-food needs. This reflects the different cultures, lifestyles, and priorities in student financial management in the two countries.

There is also research in Malaysia using surveys showing that students' pocket money allocation is used more for non-food needs than for food. Students allocate most of their budget to transportation, entertainment, and non-essential items such as alcohol and cigarettes, prioritizing social and lifestyle needs. In contrast, spending on food is suppressed by choosing cheap or fast food, so nutritious food becomes less of a priority. This consumption pattern indicates the dominance of non-food expenditure as students prioritize convenience and recreation, which may negatively affect the quality of their food consumption (15). Research in Multan, Pakistan, also showed a similar trend, where most students (61.8%) allocated only a tiny amount of money for food. In comparison, non-food expenditures such as education (43.8%),

clothing (21.4%), and entertainment (18%) were more dominant. Spending on restaurant meals is also relatively small, with most students allocating budgets in the low to medium range (21). Meanwhile, research in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, shows that 52% of students' pocket money is used for consumption needs such as food and drinks, 36% for non-consumption needs such as clothing, skincare, gasoline, and credit, and 12% is set aside as savings(3). This data shows that students in Indonesia prioritize spending on food, while students in Malaysia and Pakistan focus more on non-food needs. This difference reflects the influence of different cultures, lifestyles, and prioritization of needs in allocating pocket money for students in other countries.

Food coping strategies of college students

Several studies present data on students' food coping strategies using surveys as a data collection technique. Research at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, identified strategies such as consuming cheap food such as instant noodles and fruits from traditional markets (100%), sharing food with friends through joint cooking schedules (67%), reducing meal frequency by often skipping breakfast (93%), and returning to family homes to get food (43%). Data were obtained from a survey of 50 students selected by purposive sampling and in-depth interviews, and analyzed using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) (10). Meanwhile, research at Midwest universities in the United States shows that students deal with food insecurity by buying cheap food even though it is unhealthy, asking friends or family for help, and utilizing food pantries. About 40% of college students buy the most affordable food each month, and almost a third have to choose between buying food and meeting other needs, such as education or medication. This study used a cross-sectional survey to collect data on demographic characteristics, food security levels, food access barriers, and food coping strategies (17). Both studies show that university students cope with food insecurity by reducing the quality or frequency of meals, sharing resources, and seeking support from the surrounding environment. These strategies help them survive in difficult conditions but risk affecting long-term health and well-being.

In Canada, research has also been conducted at the University of Alberta, which shows that students face food insecurity with various coping strategies. The study used a cross-sectional survey method with a convenience sample involving students who accessed the Campus Food Bank for one year. Results from the survey suggested that 74% of students chose to buy cheap food or lower the quality of their food, while 39% delayed paying bills or university necessities. In addition, 35% of students applied for additional loans or scholarships, 24% used credit cards to buy food, 22% worked more, 18% borrowed money from friends or family, and 10% sold personal items. The survey included a 10-item Adult Food Security Survey module to assess the level of food security and structured interviews to identify food coping strategies used (22). Research at Central Missouri and the University of Arkansas, United States, with a survey based on the USDA 6-item Food Security Survey, showed that students with low food security chose cheaper foods even if they were less preferred, limited portions to last longer, and skipped meals to consume more at a later time (23). Meanwhile, research at the University of Karatina, Kenya, showed that students coped with food insecurity by eating simple foods such as rice with beans or ugali with vegetables (48.9%), borrowing food from friends (22.3%), reducing other expenses such as credit (18.1%), and skipping meals (8.5%) (18). These three studies show that university students use various strategies to deal with food insecurity, such as reducing food quality, borrowing money or food, and delaying other needs, which can negatively affect their health in the long run.

Various studies show that university students deal with food insecurity by applying various food coping strategies to meet their needs. Common strategies include reducing the quality or

quantity of food, such as buying cheap food, limiting portions, or skipping meals. In addition, many students utilize social support by sharing food, borrowing from friends or family, or returning home for food. Other strategies include utilizing additional resources such as campus food pantries, applying for loans or scholarships, and using credit cards for food needs. It is not uncommon for students to sacrifice other needs, such as delaying bill payments or reducing non-food expenses, as well as finding additional sources of income by working more or selling personal items. A complete summary of the various food coping strategies identified from the five studies can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories and Food Coping Strategies among College Students

No.	Category of Food Coping Strategy	Food Coping Strategy
1	Reducing food quality or quantity.	a) Buying cheap food or lowering food quality (instant noodles, fast food). b) Limiting food portions to last longer. c) Skipping meals such as breakfast or dinner. d) Choosing less preferred but cheaper foods.
2	Sharing and utilizing social support.	a) Sharing food with friends through joint cooking schedules. b) Borrowing food or money from friends, neighbors, or family. c) Returning to the family home for food.
3	Using additional resources.	a) Utilizing campus food pantries or food aid agencies b) Applying for additional loans or scholarships c) Using credit cards to buy food
4	Sacrificing others needs	a) Delaying payment of bills or university necessities b) Reducing spending on non-food items such as phone credit c) Choosing between buying food and meeting other needs, such as education or medication
5	Attempting to increase income	a) Working more to increase income b) Selling personal items to earn extra money

Source: Author's compilation based on references (10, 17, 18, 22, 23).

The relationship between pocket money and students' food and non-food expenditures

The discussion on the relationship between pocket money and students' food and non-food expenditures is based on several previous studies that have been collected and reviewed. Research at two universities in Nigeria, namely the University of Nigeria Enugu Campus (UNEC) and Imo State University (IMSU), used cross-sectional survey methods to show that students' pocket money strongly influences their food security. Students with larger monthly allowances tend to have a lower risk of food insecurity as they can allocate more funds for food needs. In contrast, students with limited pocket money are more likely to experience food insecurity because they have to divide their expenses strictly, often squeezing the budget for food (24). Another study in Ukraine also used a survey method and showed that financial priorities are

important in allocating student expenditure. Students with limited allowances allocate more funds to non-food needs such as transportation, entertainment, and academic supplies, thus reducing spending on food and choosing cheaper and faster options. In contrast, students with larger allowances can divide their expenditure more evenly between food and non-food items (7). Based on these two studies, pocket money affects students' consumption patterns, where financial limitations can cause spending priorities to shift from food to non-food needs, impacting the quality of their consumption and food security.

Another study conducted in Makassar that used a survey as a data collection technique showed that students' pocket money greatly influenced their spending on food and non-food needs. Students with more considerable pocket money tend to spend more on daily food with better quality or more variety, while students with limited pocket money usually choose cheaper food. Regarding non-food needs, students with larger allowances more often allocate funds for entertainment, personal transportation, clothing, or other consumptive items, reflecting their desires or lifestyle (25). Another study in Los Angeles using the interview method showed that students with low food security prioritized spending on non-food needs, such as transportation and entertainment, over nutritious food. Limited pocket money means they must keep food costs down, often by finding cheap food or utilizing free food resources on campus (26).

Meanwhile, a literature review conducted in the United States in a study entitled "Research Trends and Gaps Concerning Food Insecurity in College Students in the United States: A Scoping Review" found that financial limitations cause most college students to allocate their pocket money for non-food needs, while spending on food is minimized. As a result, students prefer cheap or fast food to save money, which can impact the quality of their consumption (27). Based on these three studies, limited pocket money makes students prioritize non-food expenses over food. Hence, their food consumption patterns tend to be less healthy and nutritious.

The relationship between food and non-food expenditures and the level of food coping strategies of university students

The relationship between food and non-food expenditures and university students' food coping strategies is the focus of this subchapter, referencing various relevant literature and previous research. The first study was conducted in the United States using a survey method. The results show that students with limited budgets tend to prioritize non-food needs, such as transportation and education, so the allocation of funds for food is reduced. As a result, they use various food coping strategies, such as choosing cheap food, reducing meal portions, skipping meals, or utilizing free food pantries on campus. These strategies are more commonly applied by students with low levels of food security to overcome financial limitations (8). This finding is reinforced by research at the University of Texas at San Antonio, which also used survey methods. Students who experience food insecurity tend to allocate spending on cheap food, such as fast food or snacks, while prioritizing non-food expenses, such as transportation, entertainment, and academic needs. This condition forces them to adopt additional food coping strategies, such as reducing meal frequency or utilizing free food facilities on campus, to meet their basic needs (28). These two studies confirm that budget constraints directly affect students' consumption patterns, leading to the adoption of various food coping strategies to overcome food insecurity. Non-food expenditures that remain a priority in limited financial conditions make students look for alternatives to continue to meet food needs, even with consequences for lower nutritional quality. This shows that food coping strategies are a survival mechanism and reflect how students navigate economic limitations in an academic environment that demands financial stability.

A similar trend was also found in research at the University of Florida. Students with financial limitations prioritize spending on non-food needs such as transportation, academic supplies, and entertainment, which impacts the allocation of funds for nutritious food. This encourages them to adopt various food coping strategies, such as buying cheap food that is less nutritious, reducing meal frequency, or even skipping meals. Some students rely on the campus food pantry or help from friends and family, ultimately affecting their overall well-being (29). Furthermore, a cross-sectional study across eight universities in the United States showed that students with financial limitations tend to allocate more funds for non-food needs such as transportation and housing. This limitation limits spending on food, so students use various food coping strategies, such as reducing the quality or quantity of food, sharing food with friends, and utilizing the campus food pantry. This finding underlines that limited food expenditure is closely related to food insecurity, encouraging students to develop various food coping strategies in the face of financial pressure (19). Similar results were also found in a study in California, which confirmed the close relationship between food and non-food expenditures and students' level of food coping strategies. Students with budget constraints often prioritize spending on non-food needs such as transportation, housing, and academic needs. This causes them to use coping strategies such as choosing cheaper food, sharing food with roommates, and planning shopping within a limited budget. Some students even reduce the consumption of certain foods or lower the food quality to ensure food needs are still met, which often impacts the quality of their health (30). All three studies show that limited pocket money causes students to prioritize non-food expenses, such as transportation, housing, and academic needs, resulting in restricted funds for food. As a result, they have to apply various food coping strategies, such as choosing cheap food, reducing meal frequency, or utilizing food aid to survive with financial limitations.

CONCLUSION

This literature review concludes that students' allowance allocation for food and non-food expenses varies across countries and is influenced by cultural factors, lifestyle, and individual priorities. Students in some countries, such as China and Indonesia, allocate more pocket money for food needs, while in Malaysia and Pakistan, non-food expenditures dominate. Financial limitations also play a role in determining consumption patterns, where students with limited pocket money tend to prioritize spending on non-food needs such as transportation and entertainment, thus reducing the allocation for nutritious food. As a result, they adopt various food coping strategies, such as buying cheap food, reducing meal frequency, sharing food with friends, or utilizing campus food aid. Although the studies reviewed have provided in-depth insights into the relationship between students' allowances, expenditures, and food coping strategies, there are still limitations in the available studies, especially regarding interventions or policies that can improve students' food security. Many studies have focused on spending patterns and coping strategies, but few have addressed concrete solutions to food insecurity among university students. Therefore, further research is needed to explore campus policies or financial support programs that can assist students in managing their food and non-food expenditures in a more balanced manner so that their well-being and consumption quality can be better maintained.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This literature review indicates that there remain opportunities for further research to examine the factors influencing students' pocket money allocation, particularly regarding socio-economic conditions, institutional policies, and individual preferences. Future studies may consider how family background, additional income, and access to scholarships and food

assistance affect students' spending decisions. In addition, further investigation is needed on the long-term impacts of students' consumption patterns on their health, psychological well-being, and academic performance, which have not been extensively discussed in previous studies. Another area of opportunity lies in strengthening campus policies to help students manage their finances more effectively. Research could focus on evaluating food assistance programs and food subsidies, as well as the effectiveness of financial literacy programs in improving students' economic well-being. Moreover, using technology in student financial management, such as expense-tracking applications or student food-sharing platforms, could serve as alternative solutions to be further developed. Thus, future research can make a tangible contribution to designing more effective policies and programs to enhance student welfare.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND FUNDING

The author expresses their highest appreciation to Udayana University for its academic support throughout the research process. Sincere gratitude is also extended to the supervising lecturer and the publisher for their valuable guidance, input, and assistance in preparing this article. The author also conveys appreciation to the Institute for Research and Community Service (LPPM) of Udayana University for providing funding support through the MBKM Research Program under Contract Number B/230.8/UN14.4.A/PT.01.03/2025, which enabled the successful completion and publication of this article..

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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	Contributions	Conducted a literature review by collecting, analyzing, and summarizing various scientific sources as the foundation of the research, and supporting the publication of the study results.
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	Contributions	Compiled literature review, participated in academic discussions to verify sources, and collected and analyzed relevant references. In addition, contributed to synthesizing the literature review that supporting the research and writing the scientific article based on the analysis.
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