

HASIL CEK_Jurnal 60160957

by Jurnal 60160957

Submission date: 19-Feb-2022 12:44PM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 1766007291

File name: PBIO-60160957-Jurnal - Purwanti Pratiwi Purbosari.docx (181.82K)

Word count: 3680

Character count: 20813



23

SCIENTIAE EDUCATIA: JURNAL PENDIDIKAN SAINS

journal homepage: www.syekhnurjati.ac.id/jurnal/index.php/sceducatia

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Knowledge and Attitude of Biology Teacher Candidate Students towards Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

article info

Article history:

Received: dd mm yyyy

Received in revised form: dd mm yyyy

Accepted: dd mm yyyy

Available online: dd mm yyyy

Keywords:

GMO

Knowledge

Attitude

Biology teacher candidates

abstract

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) provide many benefits but also promote public debate regarding their safety and risks. Currently, there is a lack of research which specifically focus on biology teacher candidates' knowledge and attitude towards GMOs. This study aimed to explore the knowledge and attitude of biology teacher candidate students towards GMOs. The data was collected through online questionnaire distributed. The data scores of knowledge and attitude were analyzed using an independent sample t-test to analyze the effect of genetic course on knowledge and attitude of biology teacher candidate students towards GMOs. A pearson correlation was used to discover the correlation between teacher candidates' knowledge and their attitudes towards GMOs. As a result, genetic course do not have a significant effect on knowledge or attitude of biology teacher candidate students towards GMOs. There was a positive correlation between knowledge and attitude of biology teacher candidate students towards GMOs.

2021 Scientiae Educatia: Jurnal Pendidikan Sains

1. Introduction

Genetic research studies have undergone rapid development especially in the genetic engineering applied to plants, animals, and microorganisms at the present time. Scientists have developed the highest amount of genetically engineered products produced by many countries for public consumption. The first commercialization of genetically modified crops occurred in 1994 (FlavrSavr tomato). In 2011, 59 countries already used products from genetically modified organisms (GMOs) (Zhang & Guo, 2011). It is widely acknowledged that genetic engineering can improve agricultural productivity and food production, reduce the use of pesticides, and yield specific desired products (Du & Rachul, 2012) (Hansson & Joelsson, 2013) (Pamfilie & Cristescu, 2011) (Mishra et al., 2020) (Schutte et al., 2017) (Bawa & Anilakuma, 2013) (Mishra & Singh, 2013). Even genetically modified organisms play an essential role in bioremediation such as **remediating industrial waste**, **reducing the toxicity of some harmful compounds**, and helping eliminate **pollution from hydrocarbons and fuel oils used** (Kumar et al., 2018). However, the use of GMOs would involve considerable risks to health and the environment, as well as ethical violations (Du & Rachul, 2012). Therefore, GMOs still have pros and cons in society.

Several studies have discussed people's knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes towards GMOs such as The general public's knowledge about genetic engineering in America (Hallman

et al., 2013) and Latvia (Aleksjejeva, 2014); ²¹ The general public's knowledge, attitudes and ¹² perceptions about GMOs in Zimbabwe (Chagwena et al., 2019); Attitudes of young people completing secondary school in Poland towards GMOs and genetically modified foods (Jurkiewicz et al., 2014); The knowledge and acceptance of GMFs in South Africa (Luntulwandile, 2014); Knowledge, perception, and attitudes of Mexican urban population towards GMO (Montesinos, et al., 2016); Knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of nursing students in Turkey about GMO (Turker et al., 2013); Knowledge and attitudes of teachers and students in India towards GMF (Mohapatra et al., 2010).

Meanwhile, in Indonesia some research studies have also been investigated including a study of biology students' knowledge of genetic engineering in the perspective of Islam (Hadi, 2021) and the attitude of agricultural scientists to GMO, especially applied in food (Judhiastuty et al., 2007). However, no research to date has empirically examined the knowledge and attitudes of biology education students as biology teacher candidates towards GMOs, including the same topic as in Indonesia. Biology education students actually study genetics and they definitely have opportunities to study the development of genetics, especially genetic engineering whereby the world community utilizes it. The students' basic knowledge about genes and also genetics generally may affect students' knowledge and attitudes towards genetically engineered products. Moreover, GMOs is an example of biotechnology product should be understood by biology teacher candidates because there are basic competencies (KD 3.10, 12th grade) consisting biotechnology based on the 2013 Curriculum in biology subjects at the senior high school level.

Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the knowledge and attitude of biology teacher candidate students towards GMOs. As they become teachers later, those teacher have to teach the materials of biotechnology to their students. Therefore, they hopefully will not only teach an illustration of conventional biotechnology examples to students but also those of modern biotechnology. GMO is basically one example of modern biotechnology that greatly affects people's lives.

2. Method

This research was conducted with a sample involving 63 biology education students as biology teacher candidates. The data was collected in September, 2021. The questionnaire exploring students' knowledge and attitude from Prokop et al. (2007) ¹⁷ was used to collect data.

This questionnaire questions were imported into online questionnaire using Google Form platform.

This study involved data checking before the analysis process. The data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS softwares. The data of students' knowledge were converted into 0 and 1 scores, where, 0 represented wrong answer and 1 represented correct answer. If respondents chose "I don't know", it was recognized as wrong answer because this indicated that the respondents lack of knowledge about the stated information. The data of student attitude from strongly disagree to strongly agree were converted into 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 scores. In terms of statements consisting of negative attitudes, the score was reversed.

The Chi-square analysis was carried out to ensure the significance association between the differences of genetic course background variable and students' response towards the asked information. The Fisher-Freeman-Halton exact test was used when the cell with the total number of the data less than five for 2x2 contingency table, and Kolmogorov Smirnov test for more than 2x2 contingency table. The score of 14 items in knowledge questionnaire were summed as the knowledge score of each student. Knowledge level of students was grouped based on Bloom cut-off point as "good", "moderate", or "low". The score of 14 items in attitude questionnaire were summed as the attitude score of each student. Attitude level of student was also grouped based on Bloom cut-off point with "negative", "neutral", or "positive" attitude (Seid & Hussien, 2018). The frequency of knowledge and attitude levels of each students' group based on genetic course were then displayed in pie chart. Each students' knowledge and attitude scores were analyzed using independent sample t-test to analyze the genetic courses' effect on knowledge and attitude of biology teacher candidate students towards GMOs. Furthermore, pearson correlation was utilized to establish the correlation between students' knowledge and their attitudes towards GMOs.

3. Result and Discussion

After conducting the research, data score of the knowledge and attitude of biology education students towards Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) were obtained. The majority of biology education students knew that genetically modified organisms are used in medicine (e.g., insulin production with GM microorganisms). This item is the question whereby biology education teacher candidate mostly respond with correct answer (92,1%). The students also knew the effect of DNA manipulation on organism genes (90.5%), the advantages of Practical

application of GM on plant nutrition, ¹³ flavor of fruits, and developing ² traits to withstand shipping process (87.3%), as well as ⁵ increase productivity and resistance of plants against diseases (85.7%). Table 1 summaries the profile of biology teacher candidate students' knowledge about ¹⁹ GMOs. Based on ⁵ Chi Square test and Fisher-Freeman-Halton exact test, only knowledge about ¹⁹ the effect of GM food on human genes and the advantages of GM plants on nutritional quality, flavor, and traits to withstand shipping process were significantly associated with genetics course ($P < 0.05$).

Table 1. The knowledge of biology teacher candidate students about GMOs

| Item | Genetic Course | | Total n (%) | P-value |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------|---------|
| | Have not taken n (%) | Have taken n (%) | | |
| <i>1. effect of DNA manipulation on organism genes</i> | | | | |
| Improper | 1 (3,8%) | 5 (13,5%) | 6 (9,5%) | 0,387* |
| Proper | 25 (96,2%) | (86,5%) | 57 (90,5%) | |
| <i>2. Material genetic transfer between different species organism</i> | | | | |
| Improper | 16 (61,5%) | 17 (45,9%) | 33 (52,4%) | 0,306 |
| Proper | 10 (38,5%) | 20 (54,1%) | 30 (47,6%) | |
| <i>3. size of GMOs</i> | | | | |
| Improper | 20 (76,9%) | 24 (64,9%) | 44 (69,8%) | 0,406 |
| Proper | 6 (23,1%) | 13 (35,1%) | 19 (30,2%) | |
| <i>4. Dangerous chemicals on GMOs</i> | | | | |
| Improper | 19 (73,1%) | 22 (59,5%) | 41 (65,5%) | 0,296 |
| Proper | 7 (26,9%) | 15 (40,5%) | 22 (34,9%) | |
| <i>5. GMOs in medicine</i> | | | | |
| Improper | 1 (3,8%) | 4 (10,8%) | 5 (7,9%) | 0,394* |
| Proper | 25 (96,2%) | 33 (89,2%) | 58 (92,1%) | |
| <i>6. Genetic engineering for microbes</i> | | | | |
| Improper | 16 (61,5%) | 23 (62,2%) | 39 (61,9%) | 1,000 |
| Proper | 10 (38,5%) | 14 (37,8%) | 24 (38,1%) | |
| <i>7. Application of Genetic manipulation in food</i> | | | | |
| Improper | 7 (26,9%) | 6 (16,2%) | 13 (20,6%) | 0,353 |
| Proper | 19 (73,1%) | 31 (83,8%) | 50 (79,4%) | |
| <i>8. Effect of GM food on human genes</i> | | | | |
| Improper | 19 (73,1%) | 17 (45,9%) | 38 (57,1%) | 0,041 |
| Proper | 7 (26,9%) | 20 (54,1%) | 27 (42,9%) | |
| <i>9. The advantages of GM plants on productivity and diseases resistance</i> | | | | |
| Improper | 3 (11,5%) | 6 (16,2%) | 9 (14,3%) | 0,725 |
| Proper | 23 (88,5%) | 31 (83,8%) | 54 (85,7%) | |
| <i>10. The advantages of GM plants on nutritional quality, flavor, and traits to withstand shipping process</i> | | | | |
| | | | | 0,007 |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------|
| Improper | 7 (26,9%) | 1 (2,7%) | 8 (12,7%) | |
| Proper | 19 (73,1%) | 36 (97,3%) | 55 (87,3%) | |
| <i>11. Characteristic of GM crop</i> | | | | 0,179 |
| Improper | 14 (53,8%) | 27 (73,0%) | 41 (65,1%) | |
| Proper | 12 (46,2%) | 10 (27,0%) | 22 (34,9%) | |
| <i>12. The advantages of application of GM methods on animals resistance</i> | | | | 1,000 |
| Improper | 7 (26,9%) | 10 (27,00%) | 17 (27,0%) | |
| Proper | 19 (73,1%) | 27 (73,0%) | 46 (73,0%) | |
| <i>13. The advantages of application of GM methods on animals' lean</i> | | | | 1,000 |
| Improper | 8 (30,8%) | 12 (32,4%) | 20 (31,7%) | |
| Proper | 18 (69,2%) | 25 (67,6%) | 43 (68,3%) | |
| <i>14. Effect of genetic modification for animals</i> | | | | 0,188 |
| Improper | 19 (73,1%) | 20 (54,1%) | 39 (61,9%) | |
| Proper | 7 (26,9%) | 17 (45,9%) | 24 (38,1%) | |

The all P-values were based on Chi-square analysis except those with the asterisk mark (*) which were based on Fisher-Freeman-Halton exact test

Figure 1 depicts the knowledge level of biology teacher candidate students about GMOs. The majority of students who have not taken genetic courses possess a low level of knowledge about GMOs. Meanwhile, at groups who have taken genetics courses, the total number of students with a low level of knowledge about GMOs are the same as candidates who have a moderate level of knowledge.

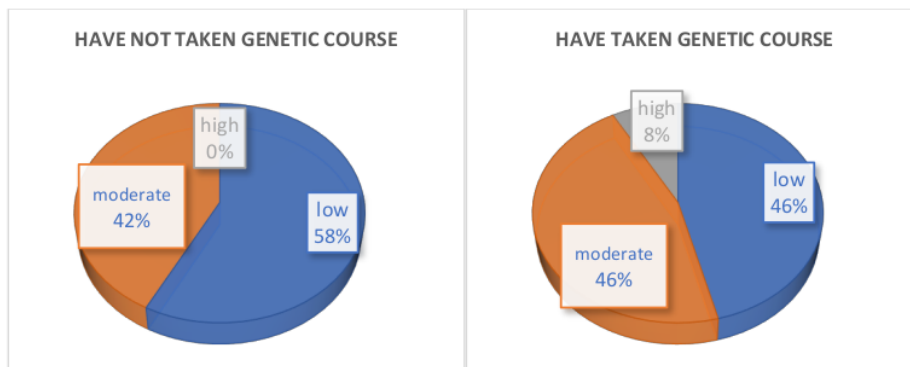


Figure 1. The different profile of knowledge level of biology teacher candidate students based on genetic course group

This low level of knowledge related to GMOs can be caused by students' lack of exploration of knowledge about the development and application of biotechnology. In addition, the biological material presented in the educational study program is not as deep as in the biology study program because, primarily, they are prepared to become a teacher, not biology scientist.

However, this is not in line with previous research, which revealed that students studying biological or physical materials should have more knowledge related to biotechnology, including GMOs (Tegegne et al., 2013). Therefore, the level of knowledge of biology education students related to GMOs, which are mostly at a low level, should be used as a reminder. Biology education students can be encouraged again to update their knowledge more regarding the development of biotechnology whose products are widely used for society.

On top of that, biology education students are prospective teachers who will be required to teach the topics about biotechnology in schools. They hopefully share teaching materials on either conventional or modern biotechnology which covers its application used widely for society. Similar results were also found in India regarding the knowledge of teachers and students related to GMOs. There are still misconceptions among teachers and students regarding these GMOs, especially the topic of genetically modified food (Mohapatra et al., 2010).

Based on attitude data collected, the majority of biology education students agreed that the public should be informed about the risks associated with GMOs (58,7%) and the food industry should take the necessary measures to provide completely safe GM food (58,7%). Test of Kolmogorov Smirnov showed that for each statement submitted, there was no significantly associated with genetics course ($P > 0.05$).

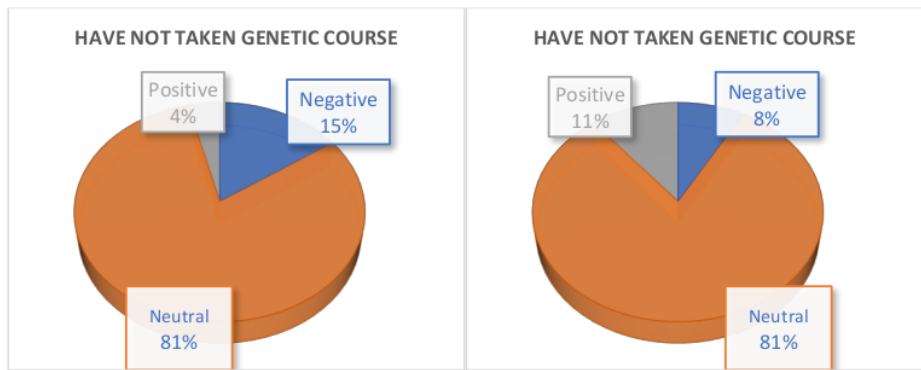


Figure 2. The different profile of attitude level of biology teacher candidate students based on genetic course group

The attitude level of biology teacher candidate students towards GMOs is shown in Figure 2. The majority of students who have taken genetic courses or not, own a neutral attitude

towards GMOs. The total biology education students with positive attitude towards GMOs only account for 7,94%. This is not in line with previous research, which stated that students studying biological material should have a more positive attitude towards biotechnology, including GMOs (Tegegne et al., 2013).

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Table 1. The results of independent sample t-test

| | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------|
| | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Pengetahuan Mahasiswa | Equal variances assumed | -1.548 | 61 | .127 | -.79522 | .51367 | -1.82237 | .23193 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | -1.538 | 52.748 | .130 | -.79522 | .51691 | -1.83212 | .24168 |
| Sikap Mahasiswa | Equal variances assumed | -1.462 | 61 | .149 | -2.14865 | 1.46932 | -5.08674 | .78944 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | -1.450 | 52.259 | .153 | -2.14865 | 1.48222 | -5.12260 | .82530 |

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Based on the independent sample t-test, it is known that genetic courses have no significant effect on students' knowledge ($t = -1.548, p = 0.127 > 0.05$) or attitudes ($t = -1.462, p = 0.149 > 0.05$) towards GMOs. This result indicates that there may be a need for unique methods in genetic course to improve students' understanding and attitudes towards GMOs, such as several studies succeed to improve students' knowledge and attitudes towards GMOs through direct practicum activities (Klop et al., 2010) (Witzig et al., 2013), the use of rebuttal texts (Heddy et al., 2016), or case studies (Dori et al., 2003). Table 1 presents the results of independent sample t-test.

Table 2. The results of Pearson Correlation analysis

| | | Knowledge | Attitude |
|-----------|---------------------|-----------|----------|
| Knowledge | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .359** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .004 |
| | N | 63 | 63 |
| Attitude | Pearson Correlation | .359** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .004 | |
| | N | 63 | 63 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson Correlation analysis was used to analyze the correlation between students' knowledge and their attitudes towards GMOs. Based on the results of that analysis (Table 2), it is known that there is a positive correlation between students' knowledge and their attitudes towards GMOs, although the correlation is relatively weak ($r=0.359$, $p<0.05$). This is in line with previous research showing a positive correlation between students' knowledge of genetically modified foods and their attitudes towards it (Heddy et al., 2016), as well as the knowledge and attitudes of high school students related to biotechnology which also discussed genetically modified products (Klop et al., 2010).

This result happen since knowledge has a big influence over students' attitudes through their impact on benefit perceptions (Zhu & Xie, 2015). When individuals have more knowledge about the potential benefits of GMOs, they naturally perceive more benefits leading to a positive attitude and greater acceptance toward GMOs (Chen & Li, 2007). Besides that, improvement at level of knowledge also may result in higher familiarity, fewer misconceptions, and less uncertainties regarding GMOs (Qin & Brown, 2006), which reduces risk perception so that the attitude towards GMOs will be positive (Siegrist et al., 2006). Therefore, a positive attitude about biotechnology (including GMOs) is generally correlated with correct knowledge about biotechnology. The prevalence of positive attitudes can also increase as knowledge increases (Heddy et al., 2016).

This is both a challenge and an opportunity. Students' attitudes towards GMOs can depend on their knowledge of GMOs, and this attitude can be changed to a more positive direction by increasing student knowledge (Zhu & Xie, 2015). To generate a more positive attitude towards GMOs can be done in various ways, such as through education in the classroom. Alternatively, as stated by Linnoff et al. (2017), factual information can be presented effectively through news

releases to the media, websites, and other places, so that negative attitude towards GMOs can be reduced.

4. Conclusion

This research has explored the level of knowledge and attitude towards GMOs among biology teacher candidate students. Based on data collected, the majority of biology teacher candidates students who have not taken genetic courses possess a low level of knowledge about GMOs. Meanwhile, at the group who has taken genetics courses, students with a low level of knowledge about GMOs are the same as students who have a moderate level of knowledge. In term of their attitude towards GMOs, the majority of biology teacher candidates students have neutral attitude level. Genetic course do not have a significant effect on knowledge or attitude of biology teacher candidate students towards GMOs. However, positive correlation existed between knowledge and attitude of biology teacher candidate students towards GMOs.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Universitas Ahmad Dahlan for the moral and material support in this research.

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