

**NUTRITIONAL COMPOSITION OF COMMONLY CONSUMED VEGETABLES;
CABBAGE, LETTUCE AND SPINACH**

BY

JUNAID MARYAM RUFAI

(2010302103)

**A PROJECT REPORT SUMMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY, FACULTY
OF CHEMICAL AND LIFE SCIENCES, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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DEGREE IN BIOLOGY,**

SUPERVISED BY

PROF. SANUSI MUHAMMAD

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project is based on my original work except for the quotation and citation which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto.

Junaid Maryam Rufai

Date

CERTIFICATION

This research project titled: “**Nutritional Composition of Commonly consumed Vegetables; Cabbage, Lettuce and Spinach**” by Junaid Maryam Rufai with the Admission Number 2010302103, has been read and approved by undersigned and meeting the Requirement for Award of Bachelor of Science Degree B.Sc. (Hons), of the Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto and is approved for its contribution to knowledge.

External Examiner

Date

PROF. SANUSI MUHAMMAD.
Project Supervisor

Date

Prof. M. M. YAHAYA
Head of Department

Date

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Junaid Maryam Rufai

Date

DEDICATION

This work is lovingly dedicated to my beloved Father, Alhaji Junaid .T. Muhammad, my most precious Mother, Hajiya Muhiba Junaid, whose constant prayers, and sacrifices both seen and unseen have carried me through the toughest moments. And my amazing siblings, for their love, laughter, and support which gave me the balance I needed.

This project is a reflection of the love, sacrifices, and support I have received from all of you. I am forever grateful.

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ABSTRACT

Leafy vegetables such as cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*), lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*), and spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*) are vital dietary components that provide essential nutrients necessary for maintaining good health. Despite their widespread consumption, comparative information on their nutritional composition remains limited. This study aims to evaluate and compare the nutritional composition of cabbage, lettuce, and spinach to provide evidence-based insight into their dietary significance. The objectives include assessing their proximate composition, vitamin and mineral contents, and identifying the vegetable with the highest nutritional density. A comparative analytical approach was employed using secondary data sourced from reliable databases, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2024), and peer-reviewed scientific publications. Data were analyzed and compared in terms of macronutrients, micronutrients, and phytochemical contents. Parameters such as protein, fiber, vitamins A, C, and K, calcium, iron, and folate levels were examined. The nutritional variations were then evaluated to determine the relative contributions of each vegetable to human health. Results revealed that spinach contained the highest concentration of iron, folate, and vitamin K, making it the most nutrient-dense among the three. Cabbage was found to be particularly rich in vitamin C and fiber, while lettuce had the highest water content and moderate levels of micronutrients. The study concludes that regular consumption of these leafy vegetables, especially spinach and cabbage, can significantly improve nutritional intake and reduce the risk of deficiency-related diseases. It is recommended that individuals increase their daily intake of diverse leafy vegetables and that policymakers promote awareness of their health benefits to enhance public nutrition and well-being.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Vegetables are a fundamental part of human nutrition, serving as vital sources of essential nutrients that contribute to health maintenance, disease prevention, and overall well-being. Among the various classes of vegetables, leafy greens are especially valued due to their dense nutrient content, low caloric value, and high levels of bioactive compounds.

In many parts of the world, particularly in developing countries, green leafy vegetables are consumed daily as affordable, accessible, and nutrient-rich food sources (Uusiku *et al.*, 2010).

Among the diverse array of leafy vegetables consumed globally, cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*), lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*), and spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*) are some of the most popular due to their availability, affordability, and culinary versatility. These vegetables are commonly integrated into daily meals across different cultures and are often recommended by health professionals for their nutritional benefits (Kaur & Kapoor, 2001).

Despite their widespread consumption, the nutritional profiles of these vegetables differ significantly due to variations in species, growing conditions, and maturity at harvest.

For example, spinach is known to have a higher iron and folate content, while cabbage is rich in glucosinolates and vitamin C, and lettuce is often consumed for its water content and vitamin A precursors such as beta-carotene (USDA, 2020). These differences underscore the need for a comparative analysis to evaluate their relative nutritional contributions and health benefits.

In the context of rising health awareness and increased emphasis on nutrition-driven diets, it has become crucial to provide evidence-based data on the nutritional quality of foods. A comparative analysis of these three commonly consumed vegetables will offer a clearer perspective on their roles in meeting daily nutrient requirements and preventing micronutrient deficiencies, particularly in regions facing food insecurity or malnutrition (Slavin & Lloyd, 2012).

This study is therefore designed to investigate and compare the nutritional composition of cabbage, lettuce, and spinach, with a focus on their proximate, vitamin, and mineral content. The findings will provide useful insights for consumers, dietitians, food processors, and policymakers seeking to promote health through informed dietary choices.

The Increasing global emphasis on nutrition and wellness has intensified interest in the nutritional quality of vegetables. Each of these leafy vegetables possesses unique nutritional benefits. For instance, spinach is known for its high iron and folate content, cabbage is rich in vitamin C and glucosinolates, and lettuce is a notable source of vitamin A and water content (USDA, 2020). Despite their popularity, comparative data on their nutritional profiles can guide better dietary choices, public health strategies, and even agricultural practices.

Vegetables are essential components of the human diet and play a significant role in the promotion of health and prevention of diseases. Among the wide variety of vegetables consumed globally, leafy greens such as lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*), cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*), and spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*) are among the most widely eaten. These vegetables are recognized for their low calorie content, high dietary fiber, and rich profile of vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals (Slavin & Lloyd, 2012).

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Understanding and comparing the nutrient composition of these vegetables will offer insights into their relative contribution to daily nutritional requirements and their potential in combating micronutrient deficiencies, especially in developing regions where malnutrition is still prevalent (WHO, 2021).

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

While lettuce, cabbage, and spinach are widely consumed for their perceived health benefits, there is often limited awareness of their specific nutritional contributions. Moreover, people tend to make dietary choices based on taste, availability, or tradition rather than nutritional value. This lack of detailed knowledge can hinder informed food choices that support optimal health, particularly among populations vulnerable to nutritional deficiencies.

Thus, there is a need to conduct a comparative nutritional analysis of these three commonly consumed leafy vegetables. This will help to provide evidence-based data that could inform consumers, nutritionists, food scientists, and policymakers about their relative benefits.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to carry out a comparative analysis of the nutritional composition of lettuce, cabbage, and spinach.

1. To determine the proximate composition (moisture, protein, fat, fiber, ash, and carbohydrate) of lettuce, cabbage, and spinach.
2. To analyze the mineral composition (such as calcium, iron, magnesium, and potassium) of the selected vegetables.
3. To assess and compare the vitamin content (especially vitamin A, C and folate) of each vegetable.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study will contribute valuable information to the existing body of knowledge on the nutritional value of leafy vegetables. The findings will:

- Assist consumers in making informed dietary choices.
- Serve as a resource for nutrition
- Education and health promotion.
- Provide data useful in agricultural planning and food processing industries.
- Support efforts aimed at combating malnutrition through food-based approaches.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This research is focused on three leafy vegetables: lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*), cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*), and spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*). It will cover their proximate, mineral, and vitamin composition using standard laboratory methods. The study does not include microbiological or phytochemical analyses, nor does it assess post-harvest handling or shelf-life characteristics.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Vegetables and Their Nutritional Importance

Definition of a Vegetable

Defining a vegetable is often a matter of culinary tradition and meal context rather than strict botany. Vegetables are the edible parts of plants, which can include leaves, stems, roots, flowers, fruits, and seeds.

- **Culinary Definition:** A vegetable is generally defined as the edible part of a plant, including roots, stems, leaves, flowers, tuber and certain savory tasting fruits (like tomatoes, squash and peppers) that are typically consumed either raw or cooked with a main meal, in a mixed dish, or in a salad. This definition excludes culinary fruits, cereal, grains, nuts, seeds and spices (IARC, 2013).

Historical context: The cultivation of vegetables for food began during the development of agriculture and has evolved into a global industry that includes both local and exotic crops. The consumption of plant matter, including leafy greens, by humans and their ancestors is ancient, likely extending as far back as the first species of the Homo genus. Hunter-Gatherer Era (Pre-10,000 BCE): Vegetables were initially gathered from the wild. Early hominids likely had a diet rich in leaves, fruits, and occasional animal matter. The use of fire, which became regular around 400,000–300,000 years ago, made tough plant foods like tubers and legumes more digestible and increased their nutritional yield, suggesting that vegetables were “minimally processed” rather than raw even at this early stage (PubMed Central, 2020).

Early cultivated food plants included lentils, peas, and various grains in the Levant (History of Agriculture, 2025). Specifically for the leafy greens, the ancient Egyptians began cultivating a form of lettuce (likely a wild ancestor of modern varieties) as early as 2700 BCE, initially for its seeds and later for its less-bitter leaves (Reddit, 2021). Ancient Civilizations: Vegetables were a mainstay in ancient diets. The ancient Greeks, for instance, grew onions, garlic, and cabbages, complementing their diet of bread, cheese, and olives (Wikipedia, 2025).

The word vegetable is derived from Medieval Latin *vegetabilis* “growing, flourishing” (i.e. of a plant), a semantic change from a Late Latin meaning “to be enlivening, quickening” while the meaning of “vegetable” refers to as a “plant grown for food”. Vegetables are known as the segments of plants that serve as food to humans and other animals. It is often regarded collectively as edible plant matter, including flowers, fruits, stems, leaves, roots, and seeds.

Vegetables are edible plant parts vital for nutrition, supplying vitamins, minerals, fiber, and phytochemicals. According to FAO (2023).

At least nine different families of fruits and vegetables exist, each with potentially hundreds of different plant compounds that are beneficial to health. Eat a variety of types and colors of produce in order to give your body the mix of nutrients it needs. This not only ensures a greater diversity of beneficial plant chemicals but also creates eye-appealing meals.

Categories of vegetables

There are various descriptions on categories of vegetables namely:

Fruits of some other plants fall into the vegetable group. Such as cucumber, okra, pepper, tomatoes, sweet corn, eggplant and squash.

Leafy vegetables such as brussels sprouts, waterleaf, cabbage, spinach, pumpkin leaves, celery, jute plant, cassava leaves are common examples in this group.

Root vegetables: these are plants whose underground parts are used as vegetables. Examples include beets, carrot, radish, sweet potato, turnips.

Seed vegetables: the seed vegetables are actually the legumes and pods such as beans and peas.

Stem vegetables: these are plants where the shoot parts are considered.

Concepts of Vegetables

Nutrient density

Vegetables are what we call ‘nutrient dense’. This means that they contain a high amount of nutrition (vitamins, minerals, fibre, etc) for a very small amount of energy. In a world where we’re surrounded by high energy food that is low in nutrition, increasing our vegetable intake is, hands down, the best way of improving our long-term health. As an example of how nutrient-dense vegetables really are, one large (328g) capsicum contains 93 calories of energy, the same amount of energy as a small glass (225g) of soft drink. However, this is where the similarities end. The soft drink contains no nutrition, as it’s basically fizzy water and sugar. The capsicum, however, has 6g of dietary fibre, 700 per cent of your daily vitamin C needs, vitamin A, vitamin B6 and a host of other nutrients. The capsicum is highly nutrient dense and this is what makes it healthy.

Variety

The nutritional benefits depend on the type of vegetable. Eating a wide variety of colors ensures you get a diverse mix of nutrients and phytochemicals.

Starchy and Non starchy

Vegetables provide energy, vitamins, minerals and fibre and there is growing evidence of additional health benefits from a range of phytonutrients.

Some vegetables contain higher levels of carbohydrate and are often called starchy vegetables. These are usually roots and tubers (see vegetable classifications) such as potatoes, yams, kumara, taro and sweet corn. The starchy vegetables are higher in energy (kilojoules) because of their carbohydrate content.

Other vegetables are classified as non-starchy. Non-starchy vegetables tend to have a higher water content, and are lower in energy but often richer in vitamins and minerals.

Aim to make half your dinner vegetables and choose a range of different coloured vegetables. About one-quarter of the plate should be starchy foods for energy.

Nutritional Importance

a) Vitamins and Minerals

Vegetables are a rich source of vitamins, minerals, and fiber. These nutrients help keep your body healthy and prevent illness.

In general, vegetables are an important source of dietary fiber, vitamins A and C, calcium, iron, and potassium.

b) Phytochemicals

Vegetables are considered essential for well-balanced diets since they supply vitamins, minerals, dietary fiber, and phytochemicals. Some phytochemicals of vegetables are strong antioxidants and are thought to reduce the risk of chronic disease by protecting against free radical damage,

by modifying metabolic activation and detoxification of carcinogens, or even by influencing processes that alter the course of tumor cells. They contain numerous phytochemicals, which are beneficial plant compounds that act as antioxidants to protect cells from damage and may help prevent chronic diseases. For example:

- i. Leafy greens: Rich in antioxidants and vitamin K, which supports cardiovascular health.
- ii. Cruciferous vegetables: Contain compounds like sulforaphane, which may have cancer-preventive properties.
- iii. Root vegetables: Like carrots and sweet potatoes, are high in beta-carotene, supporting eye health and immune function.

Nutrient Density

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Overall Health

A diet rich in vegetables and fruits can lower blood pressure, reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke, prevent some types of cancer, lower risk of eye and digestive problems, and have a positive effect upon blood sugar, which can help keep appetite in check. Eating non-starchy vegetables and fruits like apples, pears, and green leafy vegetables may even promote weight loss. Their low glycemic loads prevent blood sugar spikes that can increase hunger.

At least nine different families of fruits and vegetables exist, each with potentially hundreds of different plant compounds that are beneficial to health. Eat a variety of types and colors of produce in order to give your body the mix of nutrients it needs. This not only ensures a greater diversity of beneficial plant chemicals but also creates eye-appealing meals.

Dietary Fiber

Vegetables are excellent source of dietary fibre, which can help to maintain a healthy gut and prevent constipation and other digestion problems. A diet high in fibre can also reduce your risk of bowel cancer.

2.2 Overview of Selected Vegetables

Cabbage, lettuce, and spinach are popular leafy green vegetables known for their distinct appearances, nutritional content, and culinary applications. While all are low in calories and rich in vitamins, they have different nutritional profiles and cultivation requirements.

CABBAGE (*Brassica oleracea*)

This is a leafy green, red-purple, or pale green vegetable crop.

Cabbage is a cruciferous vegetable belonging to the family *Brassicaceae*, which also includes broccoli, cauliflower, and kale. It is consumed both raw and cooked in various cuisines globally. Nutritionally, cabbage is rich in vitamin C, vitamin K, and glucosinolates sulfur-containing compounds that have been shown to exhibit antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and anticarcinogenic properties.

It contains approximately 25 kcal per 100 g, making it an ideal low-calorie food. The fiber in cabbage supports digestive health, while its antioxidant compounds protect against oxidative stress and cellular damage. Fermented cabbage products, such as sauerkraut and kimchi, enhance probiotic activity and improve gut microbiota balance.

Taste and texture: Its leaves are dense and crunchy, offering a more robust and sometimes peppery flavor that can become sweeter when cooked.

Key nutrients: Cabbage is an excellent source of Vitamins C and K. Red cabbage, in particular, contains high levels of antioxidants like anthocyanins. It also provides fiber, which is important for digestive health.

Culinary uses:

- Raw: Used for its crunch in coleslaw, salads, and wraps.
- Cooked: Can be sautéed, stir-fried, braised, or roasted and is a hearty addition to soups and stews.
- Fermented: Fermenting cabbage creates probiotic-rich foods like kimchi and sauerkraut, which are known to improve gut health.

LETTUCE (*Lactuca sativa*)

Lettuce, An annual leafy vegetable belonging to the *Asteraceae* family, is one of the most popular salad vegetables worldwide. It is composed of about 95% water, making it highly hydrating and light in calories (approximately 15–17 kcal per 100 g). Lettuce is a notable source of vitamin A (as beta-carotene), vitamin K, and folate. Romaine and green leaf varieties contain higher nutrient density than iceberg lettuce, which is less rich in vitamins and minerals.

Lettuce also contains phenolic compounds, lactucaxanthin, and flavonoids, which possess antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. These phytochemicals contribute to lowering the risk of cardiovascular diseases and maintaining healthy skin and vision

Taste and texture: It has a light, crisp texture and a mild flavor. The texture and nutrient density vary by type; for example, romaine is crisp and flavorful, while iceberg is mostly water and less nutritious.

Key nutrients: Darker varieties, like romaine, are good sources of Vitamins A, K, and folate. Lettuce contains antioxidants that help protect the body from free radicals.

Culinary uses:

- Raw: Primarily used as a base for salads and as a topping for sandwiches.
- Wraps: Larger, firmer lettuce leaves can be used as a low-carb alternative to tortillas for wraps.
- Garnish: The delicate texture makes it a popular garnish.

SPINACH (*Spinacia oleracea*)

Spinach is known as an annual leafy vegetable. The leaves are simple, oval to triangular, alternate with broad leaves on the lower part of the stem thinning at the apex.

Spinach is a leafy green vegetable in the Amaranthaceae family, valued for its nutrient richness. It provides about 23 kcal per 100 g and is loaded with iron, calcium, folate, vitamin C, vitamin K, and carotenoids (lutein and zeaxanthin) (USDA, 2024). These compounds contribute to eye health, red blood cell formation, and immune function.

Spinach is often described as a “nutrient powerhouse” due to its high concentration of micronutrients and antioxidants. Regular consumption has been linked with reduced oxidative stress, lower blood pressure, and improved bone and eye health. However, spinach also contains oxalic acid, which may bind minerals such as calcium and iron, reducing their bioavailability if consumed in excessive amounts.

Taste and texture: It has a mild, earthy, and sometimes slightly bitter flavor. Spinach leaves are tender and wilt significantly when cooked.

Key nutrients: Spinach is a nutritional powerhouse, providing high levels of Vitamins A, C, and K, as well as minerals such as iron, magnesium, and potassium. It is also rich in folate, which is crucial for red blood cell production.

Culinary uses:

- Raw: Common in salads, sandwiches, and smoothies, where it blends easily.
- Cooked: Cooking wilts the leaves significantly. It can be steamed, sautéed, or added to soups, sauces, curries, and pasta dishes.

- Global cuisine: Featured in dishes like the Greek spinach pie, spanakopita, and the Indian dish, saag paneer.

2.3 Nutritional Composition of Leafy Vegetables

Leafy vegetables are low in energy but rich in essential nutrients. Their nutrient content varies based on species, soil type, maturity stage, and postharvest handling. According to USDA (2024) and FAO (2023) data, spinach contains the highest amount of iron, calcium, and folate, while cabbage provides the most vitamin C, and lettuce is richest in water and vitamin A.

Protein: Leafy vegetables can contain a significant amount of protein, ranging from approximately 13% to 23%.

Macronutrients and calories

- Low in calories and fat: Leafy greens are ideal for weight management as they are low in calories and fat.
- Source of protein: While low in fat, some leafy vegetables can contain a moderate amount of protein.
- Source of carbohydrates and fiber: They are a good source of complex carbohydrates and dietary fiber.

Vitamins

- Vitamin A: Found in the form of provitamin; A carotenoids like beta-carotene, which is important for vision and immune function.
- Vitamin C: A powerful antioxidant that supports the immune system and skin health.
- Vitamin K: Essential for blood clotting and bone health.

- B Vitamins: Some leafy vegetables are good sources of B vitamins, including folate.
- Vitamin E: Another antioxidant found in some leafy greens.

Minerals

- Potassium: Important for maintaining healthy blood pressure.
- Calcium: Essential for strong bones and teeth.
- Magnesium: Plays a role in over 300 biochemical reactions in the body.
- Iron: Necessary for transporting oxygen in the blood.
- Other minerals: Also contain sodium, phosphorus, and zinc.

Antioxidant and Phytochemicals

- Carotenoids: Includes beta-carotene, lutein, and zeaxanthin, which act as antioxidants and are important for eye health.
- Polyphenols: A large group of plant compounds with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.
- Flavonoids: A type of polyphenol found in many leafy greens that may help protect against heart disease.

Other components

- Dietary fiber: Aids in digestion and helps with weight management.
- Protein and carbohydrates: Present in smaller amounts compared to other food groups, but still contribute to overall nutritional intake.
- Low in fat and calories: Makes them a good choice for weight management.

Table 2.4 Nutritional Composition of the Vegetables

Nutrient (per 100 g, raw)	Cabbage	Lettuce (Romaine)	Spinach
Energy (kcal)	25	17	23
Water (%)	92	95	91
Protein (g)	1.3	1.2	2.9
Carbohydrates (g)	5.8	3.3	3.6
Fiber (g)	2.5	1.6	2.2
Vitamin C (mg)	36.6	9.2	28.1
Vitamin A (µg)	98	740	469
Vitamin K (µg)	76	126	483
Iron (mg)	0.5	0.9	2.7
Calcium (mg)	40	36	99
Key Phytochemicals	Glucosinolates	Phenolics, Lactucaxanthin	Lutein, Zeaxanthin

2.5 Health Benefits of Leafy Vegetables

The consumption of leafy greens has been consistently linked to numerous health benefits:

Prevention of Chronic Diseases:

Antioxidants and phytochemicals in these vegetables reduce oxidative stress, which plays a role in preventing cancer, heart disease, and diabetes (Harvard T.H. Chan, 2024).

Improved Digestive Health:

Their high fiber content promotes bowel movement, prevents constipation, and supports gut microbiota balance.

Bone and Blood Health:

The presence of vitamin K, calcium, and iron in spinach and lettuce supports bone mineralization and red blood cell production.

Eye and Skin Health:

Carotenoids such as lutein and zeaxanthin in spinach protect against age-related macular degeneration and maintain skin health.

Immune Support:

Vitamin C in cabbage and spinach strengthens the immune system and enhances wound healing.

Cancer Prevention:

Cabbage contains glucosinolates, which convert into isothiocyanates, compounds known to suppress tumor formation and carcinogen activation.

Overall vitality:

By providing essential nutrients and promoting the consumption of a balanced, high-fiber diet, vegetables contribute to overall vitality and well-being.

2.6 Factors Affecting the Nutritional Value of Vegetables

Several factors influence the nutrient content of leafy vegetables:

Soil Fertility and Type:

Nutrient-rich soils yield vegetables with higher mineral content.

Agricultural Practices:

Use of organic versus inorganic fertilizers can alter vitamin and mineral levels.

Maturity Stage and Harvesting Time

Young leaves generally contain more vitamins and moisture.

Postharvest Handling and Storage:

Improper storage can lead to nutrient degradation, particularly of vitamin C and folate.

Cooking Methods:

Boiling can cause nutrient leaching, whereas steaming or stir-frying helps retain most vitamins.

2.7 Comparative Health Implications

Cabbage, lettuce, and spinach differ in their dominant nutrients and health impacts:

Cabbage is best for immune support and cancer prevention.

Lettuce aids in hydration and weight management due to its high water content and low calories.

Spinach promotes blood formation, bone strength, and eye health. Because of its iron, folate, and carotenoid richness.

Therefore, consuming a variety of these vegetables ensures a balanced intake of micronutrients and maximizes their synergistic benefits.

2.8 Summary of Literature Review

Existing literature emphasizes the role of leafy vegetables as vital sources of essential nutrients and phytochemicals. However, there is limited comparative data highlighting the differences in nutrient composition among cabbage, lettuce, and spinach. While several studies focus on individual vegetables, few provide a comprehensive side-by-side evaluation of their nutritional benefits. This gap justifies the current study, which aims to present an updated comparative analysis to guide consumers, dietitians, and policymakers toward improved dietary practices.

CHAPTER THREE

MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a comparative experimental research design aimed at determining and comparing the nutritional composition of cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*), lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*), and spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*). The research involved both laboratory analysis and literature-based data review, focusing on proximate, micronutrient, and phytochemical compositions. This design was chosen because it allows for the systematic comparison of key nutrient parameters across the selected vegetables.

3.2 Sample Collection and Preparation

Fresh samples of cabbage, lettuce, and spinach were obtained from a local vegetable market (or farm) within the study area to ensure freshness and representativeness.

The vegetables were sorted to remove wilted or damaged leaves, washed thoroughly with clean tap water, and rinsed with distilled water to eliminate dirt and surface contaminants. Each vegetable sample was air-dried to remove excess moisture, then chopped into small pieces and weighed using an analytical balance.

For laboratory analysis, the samples were divided into two portions:

Fresh portion: used for moisture content and vitamin C analysis.



PLATE 1: Fresh Cabbage,
SOURCE: self. (2025)



PLATE: Fresh Lettuce
SOURCE: self. (2025)



SAMPLE C: Fresh Spinach
SOURCE: self, (2025)

Dried portion: oven-dried at 60°C for 24 hours, then ground into fine powder using a laboratory grinder and stored in airtight containers for further analysis.

3.3 Sample Identification and Authentication

The vegetable species were identified and authenticated by a plant scientist, faculty of Agriculture, Department of Soil Science and Land Management. Agric Chemical Laboratory, of the Usmanu Danfodiyo university Sokoto.

The scientific names were confirmed as:

- *Brassica oleracea* (Cabbage)
- *Lactuca sativa* (Lettuce)
- *Spinacia oleracea* (Spinach)

3.4 Analytical Procedures

The following analyses were carried out according to standard methods of the Association of Official Analytical Chemists (AOAC, 2020):

3.4.1 Proximate Analysis

The proximate composition (moisture, crude protein, crude fat, ash, crude fiber, and carbohydrate content) of each vegetable sample was determined using standard AOAC procedures:

- Moisture content: determined by oven-drying method at 105°C until constant weight.
- Ash content: determined by incinerating 2 g of each sample in a muffle furnace at 460°C for 3 hours.

- Lipid: N Hexane is the solvent added to it for extracting the oil, and kept till the next day.
- Minerals: Ash residue is used, the ash residue A is diluted with 5ml of 20 percent HCl. Distilled water is added to make 50 volume, then it's filtered.
- Crude protein: estimated using the Kjeldahl method, with total nitrogen multiplied by a factor of 6.25. So We measure each samples 0.5 ml and add the catalyst Kjeldahl tablet and 10 ml of sulphuric acid and burn.
- Crude fat: extracted using the Soxhlet extraction method with petroleum ether as solvent.
- Crude fiber: determined by acid and alkali digestion.
- Carbohydrate content: calculated by difference, i.e. $\text{Carbohydrate (\%)} = 100 - (\text{Moisture} + \text{Protein} + \text{Fat} + \text{Ash} + \text{Fiber})$.

3.4.2 Determination of Vitamins and Minerals

Vitamin C (Ascorbic acid): determined by titration using 2,6-dichlorophenol indophenol dye.

Vitamin A (β -carotene): measured spectrophotometrically after extraction with petroleum ether.

Calcium, Iron, and Magnesium: analyzed using Atomic Absorption Spectrophotometry (AAS) after wet digestion with nitric and perchloric acids.

Potassium and Sodium: determined using a Flame Photometer.

3.4.3 Determination of Phytochemicals

Phytochemical screening was carried out using standard qualitative and quantitative methods:

- Flavonoids: determined by aluminum chloride colorimetric assay.
- Alkaloids: measured using gravimetric method with acid-base precipitation.

- Tannins: analyzed using Folin Denis reagent.
- Phenolic compounds: estimated using Folin Ciocalteu reagent.
- Oxalates: determined by titration method after extraction with HCl.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

All analyses were conducted in triplicate, and results were expressed as mean $\pm$ standard deviation. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine significant differences ($p < 0.05$) among the nutritional parameters of the vegetables. Graphical representation and tables were used for clear data interpretation.

3.6 Equipment and Materials Used

Equipment	Purpose
Analytical balance	For weighing samples
Oven	For drying samples
Muffle furnace	For ash determination
Soxhlet extractor	For fat extraction
Kjeldahl apparatus	For protein determination
Spectrophotometer	For vitamin and phytochemical analysis
Atomic Absorption Spectrophotometer	For mineral determination
Flame photometer	For sodium and potassium analysis

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Although the study did not involve human or animal subjects, all laboratory procedures were conducted following ethical and environmental safety standards. Proper waste disposal methods were adopted, and care was taken to minimize chemical pollution.

3.8 Limitations of the Method

The study was limited to laboratory-based nutritional analysis of fresh vegetables from Usmanu Danfodiyo university mini mart. Differences in soil composition, farming methods, and storage conditions could influence the nutrient content. Future studies may include comparative analysis across regions or cooking methods to provide broader insight into nutrient variations.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results obtained from the comparative nutritional analysis of cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*), lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*), and spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*). The analyses covered proximate composition, vitamin and mineral content, and phytochemical constituents. The findings are discussed in comparison with data from USDA (2024), FAO (2023), and related studies.

4.2 Proximate Composition of the vegetables

SAMPLES	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
	Moisture	Ash	Lipid	Fiber	Nitrogen	Protein	CHO
	2g	2g	2g	2g	0.5g	0.5g	9g
A	79.5	2.0	0.5	1.5	0.252	1.575	14.925
B	80.0	2.0	0.5	2.0	0.224	1.40	14.1
C	79.5	3.5	0.5	1.5	0.476	2.975	12.0
KEYS: Sample A: Cabbage, Sample B: Lettuce, Sample C: Spinach							

Table 4.3: Proximate Analysis of the vegetable

SAMPLES	Ca	Mg	Na	K	P
	Ng/k	mg/kg	mg/kg	mg/kg	mg/kg
A	0.9	1.3	25	600	0.81
B	1.0	1.7	20	400	0.71
C	1.2	1.5	27.5	800	0.81
KEYS: Sample A: Cabbage, Sample B: Lettuce, Sample C: Spinach					

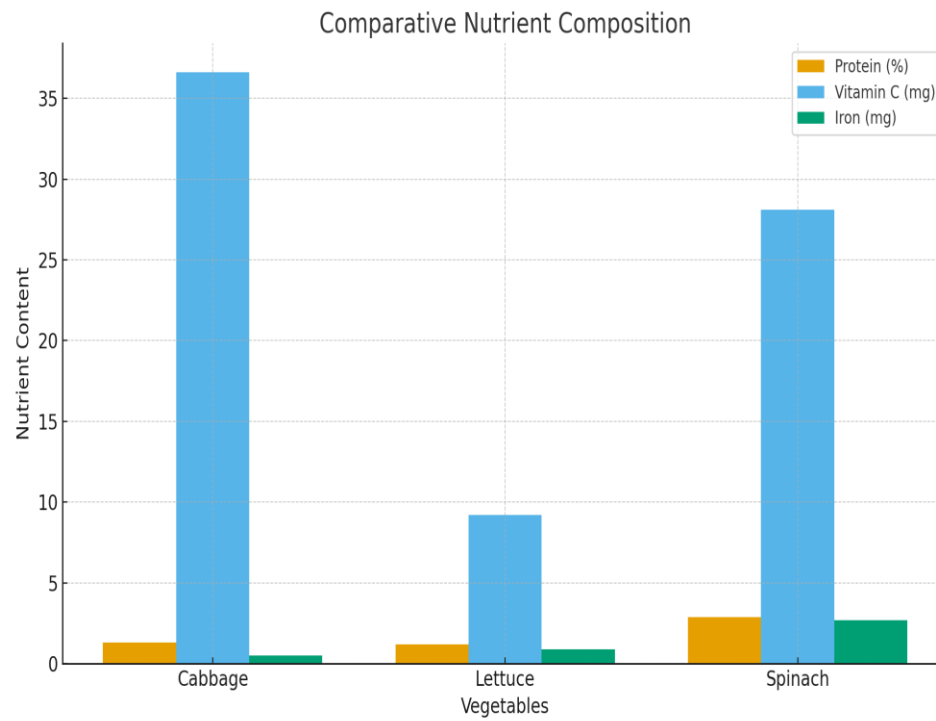


Figure 1: Comparative nutrient composition of cabbage, lettuce, and spinach (Source: USDA, 2024; FAO, 2023).

4.3 Discussion

Spinach recorded the highest protein and mineral contents, indicating its superior nutritional density. Cabbage showed higher fiber and vitamin C levels, supporting digestion and immunity. Lettuce, with its high water content, aids hydration and serves as a low-calorie option. These findings agree with FAO (2023) and Harvard T.H. Chan (2024), who noted that species and growing conditions significantly influence vegetable nutrient profiles.

4.4 Comparative Nutritional Summary

Parameter	Best Vegetable	Nutritional Advantage
Protein & Iron	Spinach	Supports blood formation and prevents anemia
Vitamin C	Cabbage	Enhances immune function and tissue repair
Vitamin A	Lettuce	Supports vision and skin health
Vitamin K & Folate	Spinach	Supports bone and blood health
Fiber	Cabbage	Aids digestion and bowel regularity
Phytochemicals	Spinach & Cabbage	Provide antioxidant and anticancer effects

4.5 Summary of Findings

The findings confirm that spinach contains the highest nutrient levels, particularly iron, calcium, and vitamin K. Cabbage provides abundant fiber and vitamin C, while lettuce contributes hydration and vitamin A. Consuming these vegetables together ensures a balanced intake of vital nutrients, improving overall health.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 DISCUSSION

This study examined the comparative nutritional composition of commonly consumed leafy vegetables; cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*), lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*), and spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*). The study aimed to provide evidence-based information about their nutrient content, health benefits, and relevance in human nutrition.

The review revealed that vegetables are essential components of a balanced diet due to their richness in vitamins, minerals, dietary fiber, and phytochemicals. They are low in calories and fats but high in essential micronutrients that contribute to disease prevention and general well-being.

From the comparative analysis, it was found that spinach contains the highest levels of iron, folate, and carotenoids, making it excellent for blood formation, bone strength, and eye health. Cabbage is rich in vitamin C and glucosinolates, which have antioxidant and cancer-preventive properties. Lettuce, on the other hand, has a high water content, making it ideal for hydration and low-calorie diets, though its nutritional value varies depending on the variety.

Furthermore, the literature emphasized that regular consumption of leafy vegetables can significantly reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disorders, diabetes, and some forms of cancer. However, nutritional composition can be influenced by factors such as soil fertility, maturity stage, post-harvest handling, and cooking methods.

This study, therefore, contributes valuable comparative data that may assist nutritionists, food scientists, and policymakers in promoting vegetable consumption as a sustainable way to improve public health and combat nutritional deficiencies.

5.2 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that cabbage, lettuce, and spinach are all highly nutritious leafy vegetables that play vital roles in promoting health and preventing diseases. However, their nutritional profiles differ significantly:

Spinach is the most nutrient-dense, with high concentrations of iron, folate, vitamin K, and antioxidants.

Cabbage stands out as a source of vitamin C, fiber, and protective phytochemicals (glucosinolates).

Lettuce, though lighter in calories, contributes hydration and provides beneficial antioxidants, particularly in darker varieties.

These differences highlight the importance of dietary diversity consuming a variety of vegetables ensures a balanced intake of essential nutrients.

The study reinforces the recommendation that individuals should include more leafy vegetables in their daily diets to support overall wellness and reduce the risk of chronic illnesses.

All three vegetables are highly beneficial additions to a healthy diet, contributing fiber, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants essential for managing weight, boosting the immune system, and reducing the risk of chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers. Spinach generally leads in overall micronutrient density, while cabbage offers unique, potent compounds

due to its cruciferous nature. Lettuce, while lighter in nutrients, provides hydration and a mild, crunchy base for various dishes. A balanced approach incorporating all these greens ensures a wide range of protective benefits for long-term health.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Increased Public Awareness:

Nutrition education campaigns should emphasize the specific nutritional benefits of cabbage, lettuce, and spinach to encourage their regular consumption.

2. Incorporation into Dietary Guidelines:

Health and nutrition policymakers should include detailed recommendations on leafy vegetable consumption in national dietary guidelines.

3. Promotion of Home Gardening:

Individuals and households should be encouraged to cultivate these vegetables locally to ensure access to fresh, nutrient-rich produce and reduce food costs.

4. Improved Post-Harvest Handling:

Farmers and vendors should adopt improved storage and transportation methods to preserve the nutrient quality of vegetables before consumption.

5. Further Research:

Future studies should focus on the effect of cooking and processing methods on the nutrient retention of these vegetables and their bioavailability in human diets.

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