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Assessment of Consumers' Attitudes and Perceptions towards Broilers and Local Chickens: A Case Study of Masambanjati Epa, Thyolo District

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Abstract: The study was conducted in Masambanjati EPA, Thyolo District, to assess consumer attitudes and perceptions towards broilers and local chickens. A total of 160 consumers were randomly selected from five villages and assessed using questionnaires. Data collected was analysed for frequencies, cross-tabulations and quantitative statistics. The results showed that 61% of respondents preferred local chickens, while 39% preferred broilers. Broilers were mainly chosen because of their low price (34%) and large size (19%), whereas local chickens were preferred for their better taste (39%), convenient availability (23%), and health and safety perceptions (18%). In terms of taste satisfaction, 46% of respondents were very satisfied and 34% satisfied with local chickens, compared to 27% very satisfied and 36% satisfied with broilers. For quality, broilers recorded higher satisfaction levels (40% very satisfied and 38% satisfied) than local chickens (33% very satisfied and 36% satisfied). Health perceptions differed between the two chicken types, with 57% of respondents associating broilers with diarrhea, 30% with antimicrobial resistance, and 13% with allergies. In contrast, 79% of respondents associated local chickens with the presence of intestinal parasites. Household size, income, and education influenced purchasing decisions, as 55% of respondents indicated that small household size reduced chicken purchases, 54.4% reported that low income led to the purchase of cheaper chickens, and 24.4% of respondents with higher education preferred local chickens. The study concludes that consumer preferences are influenced by economic, sensory, and health-related factors, highlighting the need for improved management and food safety practices in both broiler and local chicken production.

Keywords: Broilers, Consumer attitudes, Food safety, Local chickens, Poultry consumption.

List of Abbreviations

- **CASA:** Commercial Agricultural for Smallholders and Agribusiness
- **DAHLD:** Department of Animal Health and Livestock Development
- **EPA:** Extension Planning Area
- **LUANAR:** Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources
- **NGO:** Non-Governmental Organizations
- **SPSS:** Statistical Package for Social Sciences

Introduction

Livestock industry in Malawi contributes about 22.3% to the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and about 28% of the value of agricultural products [1]. Livestock provide food, income, manure, animal traction and social security. Foods of animal origin are among the favorite and commonly consumed nutrients by most human communities in the world [2].

Globally, poultry meat has become the fastest-growing source of animal protein because it is affordable, widely accepted, and easy to prepare [3]. Similar to this global trend, poultry demand has grown strongly in Malawi being the main source of animal protein from the mid-2000s owing to the increased levels of economic growth and urbanization [4]. The current poultry industry is proficient in producing broilers weighing around 2kg or more at the end of its 6-7 weeks of production phase [5].

Improved nutrition and vigorous genetic selection are the key reasons for these large sized broilers. Moreover, comfort environment and efficient management practices also assist in overall growth of the birds. Broiler production has raised public health concerns among consumers, particularly regarding the use of antibiotics and growth-promoting substances [6]. Although scientific evidence confirms that growth hormones are not used in poultry production, misconceptions about hormones and antibiotic use continues to influence consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviour. [7,8].

In contrast, local chickens are traditionally reared in free-range systems and valued for their adaptability, hardiness, and flavorful meat [9]. They require minimal input compared to broilers, relying on scavenging and locally available feed resources [10]. Local chickens are often reserved for special occasions and are perceived as healthier due to their natural rearing conditions [11]. Despite their potential, the indigenous chicken sub-sector has been overlooked, limiting its contribution to rural development and food security [10].

The comparison between broilers and local chickens highlights several challenges. Broilers face issues such as inadequate breeding stock, poor quality feed, disease outbreaks, and limited consumer knowledge of their nutritional value [12]. On the other hand, the local chicken sector struggles with low productivity, lack of organized marketing systems, and underestimation of its economic potential [13].

Given these dynamics, there was a clear need for research to explore consumer attitudes and perceptions towards broilers and local chickens. Understanding preferences for these poultry types will provide valuable insights to optimize production systems, improve marketing strategies, and align poultry production with consumer preferences. Therefore, the study aimed to address this gap by assessing and comparing the attitudes and perceptions towards broiler and local chicken meat in Masambanjati EPA, Thyolo district of southern Malawi.

Problem statement

Consumer attitudes and perceptions towards broilers and local chickens significantly influence purchasing behaviour and market trends. Broilers are valued for their affordability, quick preparation and availability, while local chickens are preferred for their superior flavour, natural rearing, food safety and cultural importance [14]. Despite their importance, limited research compares consumer preferences for these poultry types within Masambanjati EPA.

This lack of understanding hinders producers and sellers from meeting consumer needs therefore affecting marketing and satisfaction of the consumers. Consumers may lack information about the nutritional value and qualities of both broilers and local chickens. This gap negatively impacts production, marketing efficiency, and consumer satisfaction.

Justification

Broilers are fast-growing enterprise providing affordable protein, especially for low-income households. Local chickens, however, are resilient, low-input, and culturally significant, often fetching higher market value [4].

Understanding consumer perceptions and preferences in Masambanjati EPA is essential to address these dynamics. Broilers meet demands for cost-effectiveness and accessibility, while local chickens fulfill preferences for organic and culturally significant options. This study will help optimize production systems and marketing strategies, aligning them with consumer needs to enhance food security, nutrition, and economic growth in the region.

Research Objectives

1. Overall Objective

The overall objective of the project was to evaluate consumers' attitudes and perceptions towards broilers and local chickens in Masambanjati EPA, Thyolo district.

2. Specific Objectives

- To assess consumer preference regarding broilers and local chickens.
- To identify factors influencing consumer choices between broilers and local chickens.
- To evaluate consumer attitudes towards taste, quality and health perceptions of both broilers and local chickens.

3. Hypothesis

- **H_{01}:** There are no significant differences in consumer preferences between broilers and local chickens.
- **H_{02}:** There are no factors that influence consumers' choices between broilers and local chickens.
- **H_{03}:** There are no significant differences in consumer attitudes towards taste, quality and health perceptions between broilers and local chickens.

Literature Review

General Overview

Many studies have been carried out to understand how consumers view and choose between broiler and local chicken meat. [14] noted that price, quality, and health issues strongly affect consumer choices. [10] also explained that health and environmental concerns shape people's opinions of broiler products. Other researchers such as [15] found that labels like "organic," "free-range," or "antibiotic-free" make a big difference in how buyers judge chicken products. This means both broilers and indigenous chickens are judged based on how people see their quality and the way they are produced.

In South Africa, [16] found that taste, tenderness, and color are important when consumers compare broiler and local chicken meat. Their work showed that while broilers are liked because they are easier to prepare, indigenous chickens are chosen for their stronger flavour and cultural value. [9] also reported that local chickens generally have firmer meat and lower fat, which many consumers prefer.

[17] added that perceptions of poultry meat often come from personal experiences and cultural practices. In some communities, chicken is more than food, it carries social and traditional importance. [18] further explained that the country of origin and the way chicken is marketed can influence consumer trust. Consumers sometimes prefer local chickens because they believe they are safer and more natural.

In Ghana [14] showed that many households preferred local chicken because of freshness and perceived safety, though imported broilers were still common due to lower prices and easy availability. Similarly in Kenya, [19] found that buyers looked at visible qualities like color and cleanliness when choosing chicken meat. In Indonesia [12] showed that consumers preferred broiler meat with golden appearance, clean surface, and good size, especially breast meat.

Food safety is another key issue. [20] explained that when consumers hear of food safety problems, their buying behavior changes quickly. [21] also reported that urban consumers are increasingly cautious about broilers because of worries about antibiotics and growth hormones. On the other hand, local chickens are often seen as organic and chemical-free, which increases their demand [22].

Local picture

1. Overview of poultry production in Masambanjati EPA

Poultry farming in Masambanjati EPA is growing because chicken meat is one of the most affordable protein sources. Broiler farming has become common since it provides quick returns and needs less investment [23]. At the same time, many households continue to raise indigenous chickens. These birds are hardy, require fewer inputs, and fetch better prices in traditional markets. This shows that farmers are balancing between the fast growth of broilers and the cultural and economic value of local chickens.

2. Consumer perceptions of poultry meat

In Masambanjati EPA, broiler meat is widely consumed because it is cheaper and easier to find than other animal proteins like beef or goat meat. But many people still value indigenous chickens for their better taste, stronger flavor, and health benefits [24]. Just like in Ethiopia, where [25] found that consumers preferred eggs from local chickens, people in Masambanjati EPA also view local chickens as more natural and suitable for special events.

3. Views on safety and quality of poultry meat

[4] observed that worries about antibiotics in broiler feed make some consumers turn to local chickens. This is consistent with findings from [26] in Nigeria, where residues of antibiotics in broilers discouraged buyers. Consumers believe that free-range chickens are safer and healthier. The perception of quality also comes from sensory traits like flavor, texture, and meat color, as reported by [16].

4. Purchasing choices and influential elements

Consumer choices depend on many things: cost, convenience, health, and cultural importance. In Masambanjati EPA, broilers are the common choice for daily meals because they are cheap and readily available [27]. But when it comes to weddings, funerals, or other special occasions, indigenous chickens are preferred because they are linked with tradition and are seen as healthier [22]. Similar results were reported in Ghana by [14], who found that consumers balanced cost and cultural values when choosing chicken.

5. Regional programs to enhance poultry farming methods

To improve poultry production, NGOs and agricultural officers in Masambanjati work with farmers to reduce misuse of antibiotics and improve feeding practices. Such programs are also reported in Malawi by [21], which emphasized consumer education about poultry products. In South Africa, [9]highlighted that improving indigenous chicken farming methods could make their meat more competitive. These programs in Masambanjati EPA are helping to improve the quality of both broiler and indigenous chickens, and to build consumer confidence.

Methodology

Study location

The study was conducted in Masambanjati EPA in Thyolo district within the southern region of Malawi. The area was chosen for this study because it hosts a number of small scale poultry farmers' engaged in the production of both broiler and local chickens meat. Additionally, Masambanjati EPA has a diverse consumers that regularly purchases and consumes both types of poultry, making it an ideal location for examining consumer attitudes and preferences.

Survey Design

1. Sample Population

The target population for this survey were adult consumers who consume broiler and local chicken meat, and farmers in Masambanjati EPA. 160 respondents, 91 males and 69 females were assessed by the use of a questionnaire to determine their status of broiler and local chicken consumption and factors that influence their choices. The sample included individuals from diverse backgrounds to capture a wide range of preferences from the following villages: Chafa, Changata, Chagunda, Mafunga and Kuweluza.

2. Sampling Method

Random sampling was used in this study. The respondents were assessed using a questionnaire. The distribution of sampled respondents per village is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Location of respondents.

Villages	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Chafa	29	18
Changata	35	22
Chagunda	34	21
Mafunga	30	19
Kuweluza	32	20
Total	**160**	**100**

The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions to gather data. The questions covered various aspects of respondent's preferences including sensory attributes (taste, appearance and freshness), health and nutrition aspects, and price among others.

3. Data Analysis

Data on consumers attitudes and perceptions towards broilers and local chickens obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using Microsoft excel and SPSS Version 20. Frequency tables and graphs were generated as part of the descriptive statistics.

General information for the individuals participated in the study, such as sex distribution, position in the household, educational level and main occupation was also analyzed in order to understand the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and how these factors may influence their perceptions, attitudes, and consumption behaviour towards broilers and local chickens.

Results

1. Demography of the respondents

Table 2 shows household demography. Majority of respondents interviewed were males, making up about 60.6% of the total, while females represented 39.4%. In terms of education, almost half of the respondents (48.8%) had secondary education, 29.4% had primary education, 18% had tertiary education, only 3.8% had no formal education.

Regarding their household roles, nearly half (48.8%) were male owners, followed by 37.5% who were female owners or wives, 11.9% were children, and 1.8% were household workers. Farming was the main occupation among respondents (41.3%), followed by business (31.2%), estate employment (11.3%), NGO work (6.9%), and civil service (5.0%), while others made up 4.3%.

2. Preference for the type of the chickens

Figure 1 shows the distribution of consumer preferences for the two types of chickens. Out of the total respondents, 97 consumers (60.6%) indicated a preference for local chickens, while 63 consumers (39.4%) preferred broilers. The results reveal that respondents' choices were divided between broilers and local chickens, reflecting differences in consumer preferences within the Masambanjati EPA.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of broiler and local chicken consumers from Masambanjati EPA.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	97	60.6
Female	63	39.4
Education level		
No education	6	3.8
Primary education	47	29.4
Secondary education	78	48.8
Tertiary education	29	18.0
Position of the consumer in the household		
Child	19	11.9
Male owner	78	48.8
Female owner/wife	60	37.5
Household worker	3	1.8
Occupation of the consumer		
Farmer	66	41.3
Business person	50	31.2
Civil servant	8	5.0
Estate employee	18	11.3
NGO employee	11	6.9
Others	7	4.3

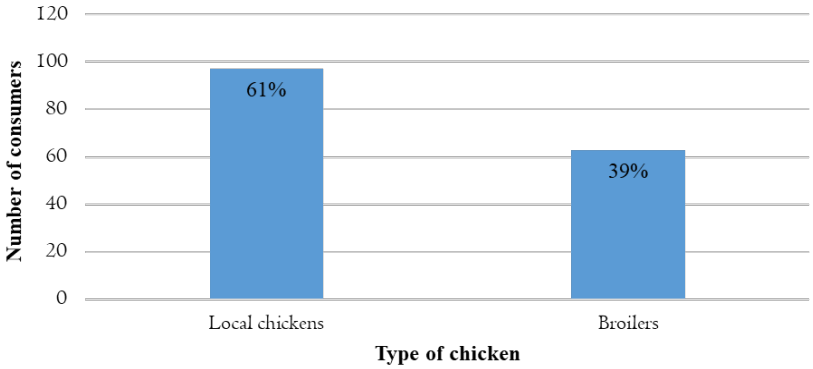

Figure 1: Preference for the type of the chickens.

3. Factors for the preferred chicken

Table 2 summarizes the factors influencing consumers' choice of chicken types. For broilers, the most common reasons were price (34%) and size (19%), followed by quality (16%) and convenience of location (9%). For local chickens, taste (39%), convenience of location (23%) and health and safety concerns (18%) were the leading factors. Other reasons included price (11%), quality (6%) and size (3%), for local chickens.

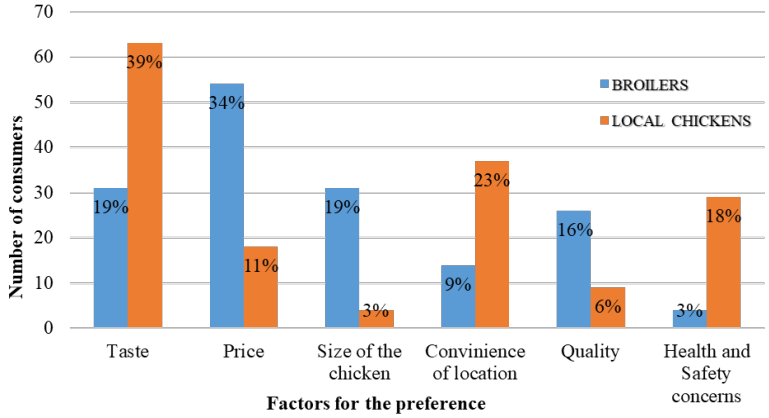

Figure 2: Factors for the preferred chickens.

4. Evaluation of consumer attitudes towards taste and quality for broilers and local chickens

Table 3 presents the levels of consumer satisfaction regarding the taste and quality of broilers and local chickens. For taste, most consumers were satisfied with local chickens, with 46% reporting that they were very satisfied and 34% satisfied, while only 8% were dissatisfied. In comparison, broilers received lower taste satisfaction, with 27% very satisfied, 36% satisfied, and a higher dissatisfaction rate of 23%. For quality, broilers recorded higher satisfaction levels, with 40% very satisfied and 38% satisfied, and only 1% dissatisfied. Local chickens showed slightly lower quality satisfaction, with 33% very satisfied, 36% satisfied, and 6% dissatisfied.

Table 3: Consumer levels of satisfaction towards taste and quality of broilers and local chickens.

Level of satisfaction				
Variable	**Very satisfied**	**Satisfied**	**Neutral**	**Dissatisfied**
Taste				
Broilers	27%	36%	14%	23%
Local chickens	46%	34%	12%	8%
Freshness				
Broilers	40%	38%	21%	1%
Local chickens	33%	36%	25%	6%

5. Evaluation of consumer attitudes towards health perceptions for both broilers and local chickens

Table 4 shows how consumers perceive the health risks associated with broilers and local chickens. For broilers, the most reported concern was diarrhea (57%), followed by antimicrobial resistance (30%) and allergies (13%). In contrast, the dominant concern in local chickens was the presence of intestinal parasites, which accounted for 79% of responses and smaller proportion of respondents associated local chickens with allergies (19%) and diarrhea (2%), while none linked local chickens to antimicrobial resistance.

Table 4: Health perceptions towards broilers and local chickens.

Variable	**Broilers**		**Local Chickens**	
Perceptions	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Development of antimicrobial resistance against specific drugs	48	30	0	0
Allergies	21	13	31	19
Diarrhea	91	57	3	2
Presence of intestinal parasites	0	0	126	79

6. Overall satisfaction with the consumption of broilers or local chickens

Table 5 shows the level of satisfaction among respondents regarding the consumption of broilers and local chickens. The results show that 27% of broiler consumers were very satisfied and 41% were satisfied. For local chickens, 41% were very satisfied and 33% satisfied. A few respondents expressed dissatisfaction, while some remained neutral about their consumption experience.

Table 5: Overall satisfaction with the consumption of broilers or local chickens.

Variable	**Broilers**		**Local Chickens**	
	Frequency	**Percentage (%)**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Very satisfied	43	27	65	41
Satisfied	66	41	53	33
Neutral	22	14	29	18
Dissatisfied	29	18	13	8
Total	160	100	160	100

7. Influence of household size, income level and educational level on type of chicken purchased

Table 6 presents the influence of household size, income, and education on the type of chicken purchased. Over half of the respondents (55%) indicated that small household size led to fewer purchases of both chicken types, while 26.9% said household size had no influence. Regarding income, 54.4% mentioned that low income led them to buy cheaper chickens, while 38.1% said income had no effect. Education level also had an influence, as 71.9% reported that low education did not affect their choice, while 24.4% said higher education led to preference for local chickens.

Table 6: Influence of household size, income level and educational level on type of chicken purchased.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Household size		
No influence	43	26.9
Large household size leading to purchase more broilers than local chicken	18	11.3
Large household size leading to purchase more local chickens than broilers	11	6.9
Small household size leading to purchase fewer broilers and local chickens	88	55.0
Income level		
No influence	61	38.1
Low income level leading to purchase cheaper local chickens and broilers	87	54.4
Higher income level leading to purchase more expensive local chickens than broilers	10	6.3
Higher income leading to purchase more expensive broilers than local chickens	2	1.3
Educational level		
Low education has no influence	115	71.9
Higher education leading to more preference for local chickens over broilers	39	24.4
Higher education leading to more preference for broilers over local chickens	6	3.8

Discussion

1. Demographic characteristics

The study showed that most respondents were men (56.9%) and that many had attained secondary education (48.8%). This means that most participants could make independent decisions about what type of chicken to buy. The high level of education among respondents also suggests that many consumers are aware of food safety and nutrition issues. Similar findings were reported by [14], who found that educated consumers are more likely to make informed food choices. The dominance of male respondents in food purchasing decisions agrees with observations made in Ghana by the same authors, where men were often responsible for household meat purchases. Recent study by [27] concluded that men frequently dominate household food purchasing decisions in sub-Saharan Africa, especially for meat and poultry. Additionally, [28] emphasized that education significantly enhances consumer awareness of nutrition and food safety, leading to healthier choices [29].

2. Preference for the type of chicken

The results indicated that most respondents in Masambanjati EPA expressed a stronger preference for local chickens compared to broilers. Consumers tend to associate local chickens with better taste, flavour, being healthier, natural rearing systems, and cultural value, which often results in higher preference scores. For example, research from South Africa showed that indigenous chickens were consistently rated higher in sensory qualities such as taste and texture [16]. Similar findings were reported in Zimbabwe and Uganda, where consumers regarded local chickens as superior in overall eating quality [11-13]. The higher preference for local chickens observed in this study therefore supports these earlier conclusions.

On the other hand, broiler chicken consumption in many regions continues to expand due to factors such as availability, affordability, and convenience [21]. However, broilers are also frequently linked to consumer concerns regarding production systems, food safety, and chemical use. Studies from Sri Lanka and Nigeria have documented widespread misinformation and fear relating to hormones, antibiotics, and residues in broiler meat [7]. Although such claims are often scientifically incorrect, for example, broilers are never raised using growth hormones [8] these perceptions shape attitudes and may suppress consumer acceptance. The lower preference for broilers observed in this study is consistent with these documented concerns.

While the results of this study align closely with earlier findings, the current data also reveal some contrasts. Research from Ghana, for instance, shows that urban consumers often prefer broilers over local chickens due to their lower price and consistent carcass quality [30].

Similarly, studies in Ethiopia and Southeast Europe have shown that broilers are commonly valued for their tenderness and ease of preparation [24,25]. The differences between those studies and the present findings may be linked to variations in culture, income levels, market access, or perceptions of food safety, all of which play important roles in shaping consumer behaviour [15].

3. Factors influencing consumer choice

Consumption of broilers and local chickens in Masambanjati EPA was influenced by different factors. For broilers, the main reason consumers chose them was price, as many households find broiler meat more affordable and easier to buy regularly [4]. Other important reasons included the size of the chicken and taste, showing that people value the bigger carcass and the acceptable flavour that broilers provide for family meals [12]. Quality and convenience of location also played a role, as broilers are usually easy to find in nearby markets and offer consistent quality [24]. Very few consumers selected broilers because of health and safety concerns, meaning that health issues are not a major factor for most broiler buyers since they fear for chemicals used for broiler production [7]. Even though these fears are often based on misinformation but they strongly affect consumer choices.

Consumers who preferred local chickens were guided by different priorities. Taste was the strongest reason, as many consumers believe local chickens have a better taste and are more natural because of their free-range feeding systems [16]. Convenience of location also mattered, with some consumers choosing local chickens because they are available in nearby villages or informal markets [14]. Health and safety concerns were another key factor, as many people view local chickens as more natural and free from chemicals, making them a healthier option [4]. People fear that broilers contain chemicals, hormones, or antibiotic residues hence preferring local chickens as healthier. Other factors like price, quality, and size were considered but were not as important as taste and health beliefs [22].

Overall, Consumers choosing broilers are mainly influenced by affordability, size, and accessibility, while those choosing local chickens prioritize taste, natural production, and perceived health benefits [30].

4. Consumer attitudes towards taste and quality for broilers and local chickens

The results show clear differences in how consumers view the taste and quality of broilers and local chickens. Most respondents were highly satisfied with the taste of local chickens, while fewer felt the same about broilers. Only a small number were unhappy with the taste of local chickens, whereas dissatisfaction was more common among broiler consumers. This pattern shows that local chickens are generally preferred for taste. Their stronger flavour is often linked to natural feeding systems, which improve both taste and meat texture [9]. In contrast, broilers are often described as having a softer texture and a less distinct flavour because of their rapid growth and intensive feeding practices [3].

When looking at meat quality, more consumers expressed satisfaction with broilers than with local chickens. This suggests that broilers are commonly associated with better physical qualities, such as tenderness, uniform carcass size, and cleaner processing [12]. Local chickens, however, are valued for their freshness and natural production, even though their meat is usually tougher and comes in smaller sizes [16]. Overall, consumers tend to favour local chickens for taste, while broilers are viewed as better in terms of quality and appearance [18].

5. Consumer attitudes towards health perceptions of broilers and local chickens

The results indicate that many respondents associate broiler meat with several health-related concerns. Diarrhea emerged as the most commonly mentioned problem linked to broiler consumption, followed by concerns about the development of antimicrobial resistance and the occurrence of allergies. These perceptions suggest that consumers are aware of potential health risks associated with intensive broiler production systems, particularly those involving the use of antibiotics, chemical growth promoters, and formulated feeds [6,7]. Such concerns may negatively influence consumer confidence in broiler meat, especially among individuals who are more health conscious [20]. Notably, respondents did not associate broiler chickens with the presence of intestinal parasites. In contrast, consumer attitudes towards local chickens reflected a different set of health concerns. Respondents generally did not associate local chicken consumption with antimicrobial resistance, and only a few linked it to diarrhea or allergies. However, the presence of intestinal parasites was widely perceived as the main health risk associated with local chickens. This perception is likely related to the free-range and scavenging production systems commonly used for local chickens, where birds are more exposed to contaminated environments and often have limited access to veterinary services [11]. While local chickens are often viewed as more natural and free from chemical residues, consumers also recognize the potential risk of parasitic infections resulting from outdoor rearing conditions [22].

6. Overall satisfaction with the consumption of the chicken types

The study found that a higher proportion of respondents were very satisfied with local chickens compared to broilers. Local chickens were valued for their strong taste, firm meat, and traditional meaning,

while broilers were liked for their tenderness and easy preparation. These findings are supported by [16], who reported that consumers rate local chickens higher in sensory quality, and by [22], who found that local chickens are preferred during family and cultural events.

According to [3], satisfaction with poultry meat is mainly influenced by sensory attributes such as taste, texture, and colour qualities that are often associated more with local than commercial chickens.

7. Influence of household size, income, and education

Household size, income, and education were also found to influence the type of chicken purchased. Small households tended to buy fewer chickens overall. Consumer preferences for chicken type were also influenced by household income. Lower-income households often opted for cheaper broilers or local chickens, while higher-income consumers tended to purchase local chickens perceived as higher quality and more suitable for special occasions. These findings reflect how economic capacity shapes food choices, and they are consistent with [27], who observed that high-income households often associate traditional chicken with social status and quality.

Education level also played an important role in shaping preferences. Consumers with higher education were more likely to choose local chickens, being more informed about nutrition and health. This supports [15], who noted that educated consumers are more aware of food safety and production systems. Overall, education appears to be a key factor in enabling people to make informed decisions about their food choices.

Conclusion

The study revealed that consumers in Masambanjati EPA have different attitudes and perceptions towards broilers and local chickens. Local chickens were highly preferred for their taste and perceived health benefits, while broilers were mostly chosen because they are cheaper and large in size. Satisfaction levels were higher for local chickens in terms of taste, while broilers were better in quality due to their uniform carcass size and tenderness. Health perceptions also varied, with broilers linked to diarrhea, antimicrobial resistance, and allergies, while local chickens were associated with parasite risks. Factors such as price, taste, quality, location, health concerns, income, and education all influenced consumer choice. The study concludes that consumer preferences are shaped by a combination of economic, sensory, and health-related factors.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, strategies to increase the production and productivity of local chickens should be prioritized. Farmers should be supported through training in improved housing, feeding, and health management practices, with particular emphasis on regular deworming, vaccination, and parasite control to reduce health risks associated with free-range systems. Introducing low-cost supplementary feeding and improved indigenous breeds can enhance growth rates and carcass size while maintaining the desirable attributes of good taste, perceived healthiness, and safety that consumers' value. Strengthening extension services and community-based poultry health programs will help improve productivity and consumer confidence in local chicken meat.

For broiler production, efforts should focus on improving management practices to make broilers healthier and safer, while capitalizing on their strengths such as large size, affordability, tenderness, and availability. Farmers should be trained on responsible antibiotic use, strict adherence to withdrawal periods, and improved hygiene during production and processing to address consumer concerns related to diarrhea and antimicrobial resistance. Public awareness campaigns should be implemented to correct misconceptions about hormone use in broilers and to promote proper handling and cooking practices. Improving biosecurity, feed quality, and slaughter hygiene will further enhance meat safety, increase consumer trust, and strengthen the competitiveness of the broiler sector.

In general, there is need to develop both broiler and local chicken sectors in Malawi based on findings from this study.

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