

# AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF FOOD AND NUTRITION EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Gozde Aydin<sup>1</sup>, Claire Margerison<sup>1</sup>, Anthony Worsley<sup>2</sup>, Alison Booth<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences, Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition (IPAN), Deakin University, Geelong, Australia  
<sup>2</sup> School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia

✉ gaydin@deakin.edu.au



## BACKGROUND

- Australian children's diets are far from optimal with high consumption of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods.<sup>1</sup>
- Healthy practices established at early ages, such as following a well-balanced diet have the potential to last a lifetime.<sup>2</sup>
- Teacher delivered food and nutrition education (FNE) can be effective in improving children's food literacy and eating habits.<sup>3</sup>
- However, teachers are known to have some barriers to the delivery of FNE globally.<sup>4</sup>

## METHODS

- Seventeen primary school teachers from Victoria, Australia participated in semi-structured interviews.
- Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and underwent thematic analysis through the template analysis technique<sup>5</sup> using the NVivo software.

“... the aide and I were both very committed to doing some kind of food preparation every week. The principal, to be honest, thought it was a waste of time. He wasn't on board at all. He thought what we were doing was not part of the curriculum, so why were we doing it?”

Teacher 3

**OBJECTIVE:** To obtain a deeper understanding of Australian primary school teachers' experiences and views of teaching FNE in primary schools.

## FINDINGS

- Teachers acknowledged the importance of FNE and were willing to include more FNE content into their teaching.
- They reported that they taught various food and nutrition topics, including practical components such as cooking and gardening as well as environmental sustainability and food production related topics.
- They cooperated with a number of external teaching partners in particular, for practical FNE components.
- There were inconsistencies among schools in terms of FNE teaching frequency, the inclusion of topics and resources used.
- Several barriers to teaching FNE were mentioned, including scarcity of funds and time, lack of support from school administration, competition for time allocation with other compulsory subjects, and a lack of professional development.

“My food education comes from grandparents and parents who used to have a vegetable garden and who would cook food from scratch, but I know that the next generation do not see the same. If we want to have children to be healthy, schools have a responsibility to educate. It's not just up to families to do that.”

Teacher 12

## CONCLUSIONS

- Teachers are willing to teach FNE and deliver several FNE topics with the assistance of various external teaching partners. However, they face a number of barriers including lack of time, funding, principal's support and professional development.
- The efforts to teach FNE in Australian primary schools are promising and addressing the identified barriers would increase the effectiveness of future FNE programs.

## REFERENCES

- 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics National health survey first results. 2018
2. Nicklaus S, Remy E. Early Origins of Overeating: Tracking Between Early Food Habits and Later Eating Patterns. *Curr Obes Rep.* 2013, 2(2):179-184.
3. Food and Agriculture Organisation School-based food and nutrition education – A white paper on the current state, principles, challenges and recommendations for low- and middle-income countries. . Rome: Food and Agriculture Organisation. 2020.
4. Bergling, E., Pendleton, D., Owen, H., Shore, E., Risendal, B., Harpin, S., Whitesell, N., & Puma, J. (2021). Understanding the experience of the implementer: teachers' perspectives on implementing a classroom-based nutrition education program. *Health Education Research.*