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Food and nutrition education: primary school teaching practices and environments in Australia

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Primary schools are an opportune setting for building food and nutrition (FN) literacy through provision of FN education[(1)]; however, little is known about the delivery of FN education in the primary school setting. The aim of this study is to explore FN teaching practices and environments in Australian primary schools. A quantitative cross-sectional survey of primary school teachers was undertaken to collect preliminary data between August–September 2022. Data was collected about FN teaching practices and environments within the domains of nutrition literacy, food skills development and food sustainability education. Participants were 91 teachers of primary school students (Foundation–Grade 6) in Australia, recruited via social media advertising. The majority of teachers reported it is important to teach students about nutrition ($n = 85$; 93%), food skills ($n = 80$; 88%) and food sustainability ($n = 83$; 91%), though half reported core curriculum subjects of English ($n = 47$; 52%) and Maths ($n = 46$; 51%) were more important. Most teachers agreed schools should teach FN within the curriculum ($n = 74$; 81%) and 87% ($n = 79$) reported FN was taught to their students. FN was most frequently taught once or twice a term ($n = 25$; 27%) or once or twice a year ($n = 21$; 23%). Few teachers had undertaken training to teach nutrition ($n = 10$; 11%), food skills ($n = 9$; 10%) or food sustainability ($n = 9$; 10%) and only 16% ($n = 15$) reported receiving funding from their school to undertake such training. However, 84% of teachers ($n = 76$) reported teaching FN themselves. Of these, 92% ($n = 70/76$) utilised a cross-curriculum approach. Most commonly, FN education was incorporated into the subject Health and Physical Education ($n = 55$), followed by English ($n = 39$), Science ($n = 38$) and Humanities and Social Sciences ($n = 24$). Most teachers reported their school had a food garden ($n = 66$; 73%), food waste management system ($n = 54$; 59%) and a kitchen for cooking ($n = 48$; 53%), however use of these facilities for teaching FN was variable. The most commonly reported barriers to teaching FN included inadequate funding ($n = 52$; 57%), inadequate teaching resources and materials ($n = 37$; 41%), and lack of school management support ($n = 35$; 38%). From these preliminary results, we conclude that whilst Australian teachers value FN education, teaching priorities and practices vary and are influenced by a number of factors, including the availability of funding, resources and broader school support. Participant recruitment into this study will continue into 2023. Findings will be used to inform future resource development as well as policy, advocacy and funding measures to further enable teachers and schools to deliver FN education in the primary school setting.

Reference

1. Kelly RK & Nash R (2021) *J Sch Health* **91**, 660–669.