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Primary school food education policy worldwide: A scoping review

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Primary school food education policy worldwide: A scoping review

Structured abstract:

Purpose

This paper establishes the extent and nature of international literature about primary school food education. It investigates what type of policies are analysed, which methods are used, what policy recommendations were made, and what gaps exist in research.

Methodology

A scoping review method was used to analyse the policy aspect of primary school food education original research papers. Searches were conducted in a range of interdisciplinary databases including Academic Search Ultimate, CINAHL Ultimate, Health Policy Reference Centre, Medline Complete, Political Science Complete, Sociology Source Ultimate, Education Resources Information Center, Scopus, Social Policy and Practice and Web of science.

Findings

A total of 14 papers met inclusion criteria. Studies were published between 2011 and 2024, focused on national and state curriculum policy, and used content analysis methods. Recommendations called for **more joined-up, cohesive policymaking across Government**, and curriculum improvements. Extensive research gaps were identified, including **varied** food education policy approaches from different countries and examination of the food education policy environment.

Research limitations /implications

The systematic nature of scoping reviews, including papers only in the English language, and excluding grey literature limits the scope of research included in this review. Meanwhile, data was of variable quality, and some papers did not specify which policies were analysed, which led to data collection challenges.

Originality

Research into the policy aspect of primary school food education is **scarce**. This scoping review adds to the knowledge base, by establishing the features of research to date in this field.

Keywords: Food education, nutrition education, food education policy, policy, primary school, elementary school.

1. Introduction

Children today suffer disproportionately from the effects of the food system (FS) (Dimbleby, 2021). One in three children in the UK are overweight or obese by the time they leave primary school (NHS, Digital, 2021). Meanwhile, ultra-processed foods consumption is on the rise in children around the world (UNICEF, 2025), linked to a decline in children's vegetable consumption (Food Foundation, 2021).

Yet the global FS does have the potential to provide healthy sustainable diets to everyone in 2050 and beyond (Willett et al., 2019). Therefore, transformation of this dynamic, interconnected system **requires holistic consideration across government involving a range of hard (taxes or mandatory reporting) and soft policy levers, such as nudging consumer behaviour or education** (UN, 2019; Yap, 2023). Schools are acknowledged as sites of food system transformation where children can develop healthy habits during the first 8,000 days of life (Pastorino et al., 2023; WHO, 2006), especially as learning about food at home is in decline (Lavelle et al., 2019).

Broad school food programmes that deliver meals, school gardens, **train teachers in food education, and provide** nutrition education, food skills and food literacy are considered essential action for reorientating food systems to healthy sustainable diets (Walton et al., 2023). Also known as a Whole School Approach (WSA) to Food, it has the potential to contribute to multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) **such as SDG3 (Good health and wellbeing) and SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production) and** equip children with the skills and knowledge they need (FAO, 2020). Yet, recommendations and hard and soft policies to date focus on school meals (Cohen et al., 2023; Department for Education, 2026; Willett et al., 2019), rather than integrating **food education**

curriculums through WSA to food (Bryant et al., 2023). Food education such as cooking or gardening improve health outcomes, especially when combined with other interventions such as improved school meals and environments (Charlton et al., 2020; Varman et al., 2021).

Evidence suggests food education during childhood and adolescence has the potential to develop positive health, cooking and sustainability behaviours, that track into adulthood (Lavelle et al., 2016; Worsley et al., 2016; Laska et al., 2012), **especially for young children, as childhood** is considered the best time for skills and knowledge development (Janacsek et al., 2012; Martin et al., 2022). Government investment in primary school food education could therefore benefit generation by equipping them with skills and knowledge to eat healthy sustainable diets and career opportunities in the food system (Francis, 2025).

To make food education a reality for all children, clear and coherent policy (Jamie Oliver Food Foundation, 2017) **using both hard and soft policy levers is necessary (Willet et al., 2019).** Policy, defined as “a statement of the Government’s position, intent or action” (Gov.uk, 2012) that includes curriculum as a form of policy (Kridel, 2010), spans national, local and individual school policymaking. Historically, school food policy research has focused more on school meals (Cohen et al., 2023; Spill et al., 2024) and food environments (Pineda et al., 2022; Micha et al., 2018). **Therefore, this study focuses on primary school food education policy (PSFEP) that encompasses the development food skills and knowledge.**

Current research about secondary school food education policy includes national policy reviews such as analysis of UK school meals and curriculums (Lalli et al., 2024), **historical analysis of Irish Home Economics** (McCloat and Caraher, 2019) **and decolonization of South African** Home Economics curriculum (Zwane and Mpofu, 2022). Broader reviews examine international secondary Home Economics curriculums (McCloat and Caraher, 2020) or conduct a cross-cultural comparison of American and South Korean Home Economics curriculums (McCombie and Hwang, 2017). Previous

research analysing primary school curriculums around the world indicated limited research about PSFEP (Smith et al., 2022).

Scoping reviews are a common methodology used to map the breadth of literature and gives a full overview of evidence to date (Tricco et al. 2018). **Searches** of the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews and JBI Evidence Synthesis confirmed no current or in progress reviews on this topic. Therefore, building on existing research on secondary school food education policy, and to address the gap in primary school research, this study provides an exclusive overview of the international literature in PSFEP. Using the concept of Food Literacy (**Slater et al., 2018; Vidgen and Gallegos, 2014**) this study defines food education as a comprehensive approach that includes food skills and knowledge, socio-cultural topics, and sustainability and food equity. Therefore, Food Literacy ensures the literature includes as many forms of food education are possible, rather than focusing on narrower conceptions such as nutrition education or **emerging definitions such as FS literacy** (Martin, Haines and Fraser, 2025).

This study brings the rigour of scoping review methods, widely used in health research, to new areas of policy and food education (Mak and Thomas, 2022a). It captures the volume and research focus across the field, appropriate for an area of emerging evidence such as PSFEP (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005; Munn et al., 2018). **Therefore, this** scoping review analyses the extent and nature of existing research about primary school food education policy, using the following research questions:

1. What is the extent and nature of existing research worldwide concerning the policy perspective of primary school food education?
2. Which policies and types of policy are analysed in PSFEP research, and how are they analysed?
3. What recommendations are made in PSFEP research?
4. What are the current gaps in research regarding PSFEP?

2. Methods

The review was conducted in accordance with the JBI methodology for scoping reviews, using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines (Aromataris, *et al.*, 2024). Further detail can be found in the protocol (Smith *et al.*, 2024). Screening was conducted by two independent reviewers to reduce paper selection bias. This research draws from secondary data sources and therefore does not require ethical approval.

2.1. Search strategy overview

The search strategy was developed in consultation with a subject librarian. **As PSFEP is an emerging area, a limited number of papers was anticipated.** To address this, searches were not limited to any specific country, method, or food education approach. Inclusion criteria (Table I) were developed using the Population, Concept, Context (PCC) framework, limited to peer reviewed journal articles in English, as the reviewers’ primary language. Criteria included studies from the last 20 years (between 1 January 2004 and 1 January 2024) to balance finding recent research, with a large enough sample. **Studies reporting interventions, and grey literature including government policies were excluded as this research was concerned with academic research about PSFEP.** Databases used included Academic Search Ultimate, CINAHL Ultimate, Health Policy Reference Centre, Medline Complete, Political Science Complete, Sociology Source Ultimate, Education Resources Information Center, Scopus, Social Policy and Practice and Web of science for a wide range of journals across education, policy, health, and food topics.

[INSERT Table I. Inclusion and exclusion criteria using the PCC framework. Source: Authors.]

The query string was developed using search terms informed by previous research experience. The 59 Food Literacy competencies (Slater *et al.*, 2018) were selected as a proxy for all the forms of food

education. Whilst the FL competencies represent what adolescents need to transition into adulthood, this needs to begin as early as possible (Ares, et al., 2023), ideally in primary school, therefore applied in this research. Terms were truncated using * to ensure all versions of the word are captured in searches, for example curriculum, curriculums and curriculums. The final search query used was: “primar* school*” OR “element* school*” OR “primar* educat*” OR “elementar* educat*” AND “Food educat*” OR “Cook*” OR “Food liter*” OR “Home economics” OR “Sensory food education” OR “Food safety” OR “Garden*” OR “Nutrition education” OR “Nutrition” AND “Polic*” OR “Legislat*” OR “Guidance” OR “strateg*” OR “curricul*” OR “syllab*” OR “regulat*” OR “govern*”. Systematic screening software Rayyan (Ouzzani *et al.*, 2016) was used **throughout the research to** manage papers accurately and efficiently.

2.2. Screening stages

Screening was conducted by two independent reviewers to reduce paper selection bias. Firstly, both reviewers undertook a pilot to independently screen 50% of the article title and abstract from one database using Rayyan (Ouzzani *et al.*, 2016) to check consistency of decision making and ensure inclusion and exclusion criteria were fit for purpose (Mak and Thomas, 2022b). Conflicts were resolved between reviewers, and inclusion criteria were reviewed for any changes. All results from each database were imported into Rayyan (Ouzzani *et al.*, 2016) and duplicates removed. All titles and abstracts were screened by the first reviewer, and the second reviewer reviewed 50% as a pragmatic solution to budgetary and time constraints, supported by 90% agreement on screening decisions. Finally, all papers selected for full text analysis were reviewed by the first reviewer, and the second reviewer reviewed 50%.

2.3. Data extraction and analysis

The lead reviewer extracted data from papers using Microsoft Excel. **All authors collaborated on a data extraction form was developed in Excel using research questions and common categories of scoping review data extraction (Aromataris, et al., 2024; Mak and Thomas, 2022b).** For each paper, the author, year of publication, location of source data, population, methods, frameworks used, food

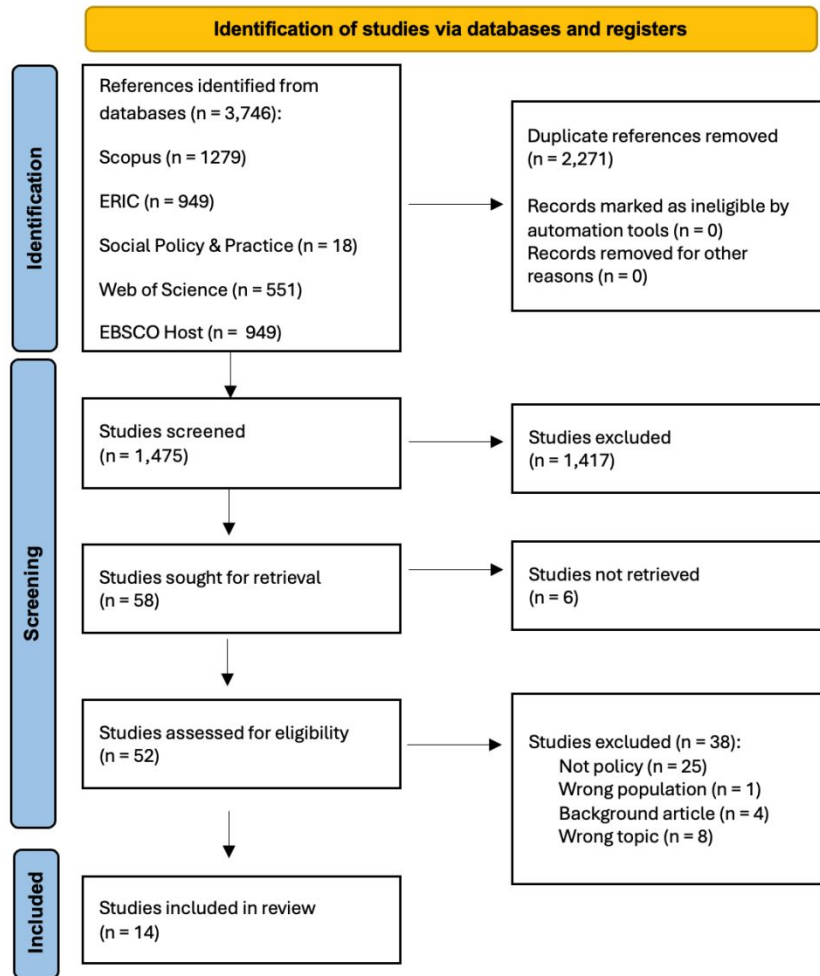
education type, education phase, policy area, level of policymaking studied, policies studied, policy recommendations and research gaps were extracted.

The purpose of the study was to identify key elements of each research paper, so data were analysed by the lead reviewer using deductive content analysis, (Elo and Kyngas, 2008). Papers were then methodically analysed (Coe and Scacco, 2017) and numerical patterns were reported, such as the number of papers that used each methodology. A narrative summary below explains how findings answered research questions.

3. Results

Searches across 10 databases yielded 3,746 results (Figure 1). After 2,271 duplicates were removed, 1,475 paper titles and abstracts were screened. A total of 1,417 papers were excluded as they did not include research about food education in school hours, were not about policy, did not focus on primary school age children, or full texts could not be found (n=6). The final full text screening included 14 papers selected for data extraction (Table II). The following results are structured by data extraction titles, followed by a discussion of how findings answer the research questions.

Figure 1. PRISMA-SCr diagram for scoping review. Source: Authors.



[INSERT: Table II. Papers that met inclusion criteria. Source: Authors.]

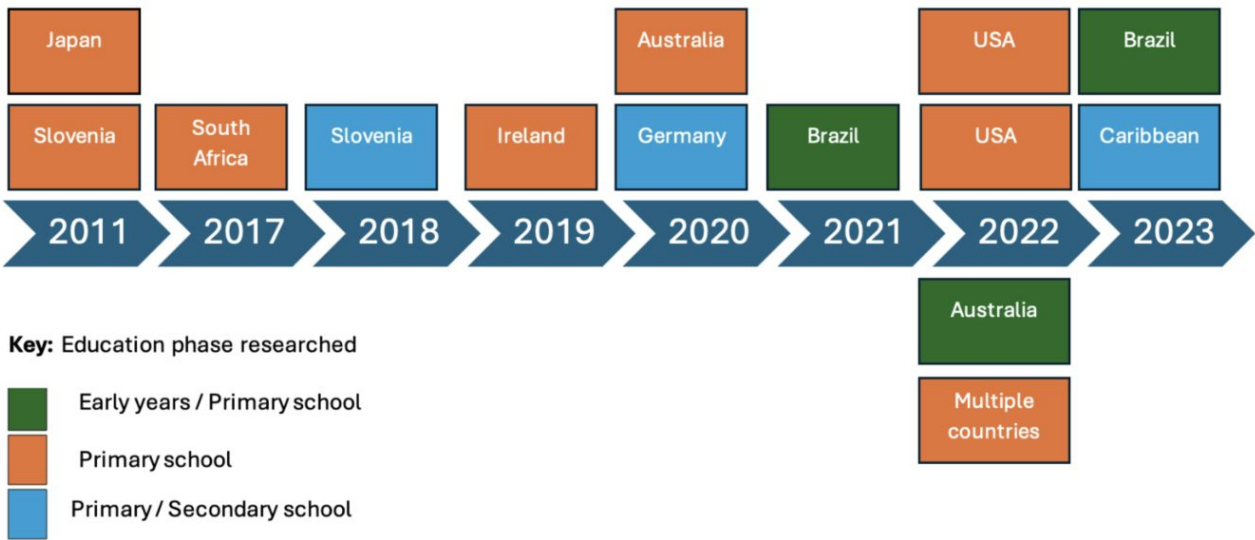
3.1. When, where and which education phase

Despite searching across the last 20 years, the earliest paper was published in 2011, with the remaining papers published from 2018 onwards. Studies researched policy in 9 different, mostly high-income countries, including Australia (Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022; Love *et al.*, 2020), Brazil, (Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023; Maldonado *et al.*, 2022), the Caribbean (Jones *et al.*, 2023), Germany (Dankers *et al.*, 2020), Ireland (McCloat and Caraher, 2019; Japan (Nakamura, 2011), Slovenia (Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011; Ovca,

et al., 2018), South Africa (Nguyen *et al.*, 2017), USA (Classen *et al.* 2022; Melnick *et al.*, 2022). One paper examined multiple countries, examining policy from 11 nations (Smith *et al.*, 2022).

Studies were evenly split between examining only primary/elementary school (Classen *et al.*, 2022; Dankers *et al.*, 2020; Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011; Love *et al.*, 2020 ; Melnick *et al.*, 2022; Nakamura, 2011; Nguyen *et al.*, 2017; Smith *et al.*, 2022) and multiple education phases, either early years and primary school (Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022; Maldonado *et al.*, 2022) or primary and secondary school (Dankers *et al.*, 2020; Jones *et al.*, 2023; McCLoat and Caraher, 2019; Ovca *et al.*, 2018). Figure 2 provides an overview of when research was published, which country’s policy was analysed concerning which education phase.

Figure 2: Timeline of published paper, country and education phase of research. Source: Authors.



3.2. Population, sample sizes, methods and frameworks applied

Half of the papers researched directly with specific populations such as children (Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011; Melnick *et al.*, 2022) or PSFEP actors such as policymakers or teachers (Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023; Love *et al.*, 2020; Nguyen *et al.*, 2017). The remaining papers analysed documents for specific actors involved in policy implementation (i.e. curriculum documents for teachers) rather than directly

with populations (Classen *et al.*, 2022; Dankers *et al.*, 2020; Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022; Maldonado *et al.*, 2022; Melnick *et al.*, 2022; Ovca *et al.*, 2018; Smith *et al.*, 2022). Sample sizes varied across the studies, ranging from surveys of 630 pupils (Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011) to 36 stakeholder interviews (Love *et al.*, 2020).

Half the papers used document content analysis (Classen *et al.*, 2022; Dankers *et al.*, 2020; Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022; Love *et al.*, 2020; Maldonado *et al.*, 2021; Ovca *et al.*, 2018; Smith *et al.*, 2022), followed by surveys (Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023; Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011; Love *et al.*, 2020; Melnick *et al.*, 2022) and interviews (Love *et al.*, 2020; Maldonado *et al.*, 2021; Nakamura 2011; Nguyen *et al.*, 2017). Other methods included plate waste analysis (Melnick *et al.*, 2022), narrative reviews (McCloat and Caraher, 2019), and process description methods (Jones *et al.*, 2023).

Analytical methods included statistical analysis (Classen *et al.*, 2022; Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023; Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011; Melnick *et al.*, 2022), content analysis (Dankers *et al.*, 2020; Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022; Ovca *et al.*, 2018; Smith *et al.*, 2022), thematic analysis (Love *et al.*, 2020; Nguyen *et al.*, 2017), and comparative analysis (Maldonado *et al.*, 2021). Three provided no analysis methods (Jones *et al.*, 2023; McCloat and Caraher, 2019; Nakamura, 2011). Only 2 papers applied theoretical frameworks (Food Dimensions and Culinary Capital), and 4 papers applied analytical frameworks (Food Literacy, Food Dimensions, HACCP and FRAME).

3.3. Food education types

Eleven different food education types were found across 14 papers (Table III). Nine papers researched broad food education conceptions (Food education, Food and Nutrition education, Home Economics, Food Literacy, Food and Nutrition Literacy) whilst five focused on specific topics of food education such as food safety, nutrition or food waste (Classen *et al.*, 2022; Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022; Ovca *et al.*, 2018). Two papers researched multiple food education forms, such as food education and food literacy (Smith *et al.*, 2022) and healthy eating and food waste (Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022).

[INSERT: Table III. Different food education types in PSFEP research using terms from papers. Source: Authors.]

3.4. Policy level, policy area and specific policies analysed

The policy level analysed spanned national (Jones *et al.*, 2023; Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011; Maldonado *et al.*, 2021; McCloat and Caraher, 2019; Nakamura, 2011; Nguyen *et al.*, 2017; Ovca *et al.*, 2018; Smith *et al.*, 2022), state (Classen *et al.*, 2022; Dankers *et al.*, 2020; Love *et al.*, 2020; Melnick *et al.*, 2022) state and municipal (Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023) and state and school level (Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022).

The policy area of each study spanned several topics, mostly focused on curriculum policy (Dankers *et al.*, 2020; Jones *et al.*, 2023; Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011; Love *et al.*, 2020; Maldonado *et al.*, 2022; McCloat and Caraher, 2019; Nakamura, 2011; Nguyen *et al.*, 2017; Ovca *et al.*, 2018; Smith *et al.*, 2022), as well as school meals (Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023; Melnick *et al.*, 2022; Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022) and wider education policy (Classen *et al.*, 2022; Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022) such as school improvement plans. Three papers examined multiple policy areas in different combinations: food education with policy protecting a right to food and food security (Da Silva Florintino, *et al.*, 2023); policy concerning healthy eating and environmental food packaging waste (Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022); and implementing food based dietary guidelines into the curriculum and integrating it with wider school health policy (Nguyen *et al.*, 2017). Despite school meals being part of the exclusion criteria, 3 papers have food education integrated with school meals, for example the US government meal programmes nutrition education (Melnick *et al.*, 2022).

The specific policies analysed included curriculum and non-curriculum policies. A wide range of non-curriculum policies such as school campus improvement plans (Classen *et al.*, 2022), environmental food packaging waste (Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022), and dietary guidelines (Nguyen *et al.*, 2017) were included. Curriculum topics included examining the extent of food and nutrition education in German state curriculum (Dankers *et al.*, 2020), the policy process for nutrition education in Caribbean curriculums

(Jones *et al.*, 2023), **evaluating Slovenian nutrition education**, analysis of food education curriculum (Love *et al.*, 2020; Maldonado *et al.*, 2022; Smith *et al.*, 2022), an historical analysis of Irish Home Economics curriculum (McCloat and Caraher, 2019) and nutrition education in Japan (Nakamura, 2011). Four papers specifically analysed primary school food education curriculum documents for evidence of food safety (Ovca *et al.*, 2018), food and nutrition education (Love *et al.*, 2020) food and nutrition literacy (Dankers *et al.*, 2020) and how food literacy competencies were addressed (Smith *et al.*, 2022).

3.5. Policy recommendations from the research

Eight papers provided policy recommendations spanning policymaking, curriculum and resources topics. Policymaking recommendations highlighted a need to produce clear and well-defined policies through a continuous process for improvement, with the time to plan, implement and evaluate policy (Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023; Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022). **Four papers called for joined up policymaking to address competing aims in health, education and the environment (Classen *et al.*, 2022; Lalchandani *et al.*, 2022; Love *et al.*, 2020; Nguyen *et al.*, 2017). Joined up policymaking is defined as taking a holistic perspective, working horizontally within Government, and vertically with other parties to ensure coherent and sustainable policy (Bullock *et al.*, 2001).**

Curriculum recommendations included policy changes to increase hours and change structures (Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011; Ovca *et al.*, 2018). At school level policymaking, a whole school approach to food was recommended to counter the ad-hoc nature of food education, alongside capacity building, leadership support (Love *et al.*, 2020). Resource recommendations called for teacher training (Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023; Jones *et al.*, 2023; Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011; Nguyen *et al.*, 2017; Ovca *et al.*, 2018), quality resources (Jones *et al.*, 2023; Love *et al.*, 2020) and multidisciplinary food education interventions (Classen *et al.*, 2022).

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3 **3.6. Research gaps identified in the literature**
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5 The literature identified a lack of research about PSFEP, including examination of different country and
6 state approaches (Dankers *et al.*, 2021; Da Silva Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023; Smith *et al.*, 2022),
7 particularly the type and amount of research about primary school food education policy and the methods
8 used to examine national, regional and school level policy (Dankers *et al.*, 2021; Da Silva Da Silva
9 Florintino *et al.*, 2023; Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011).
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12 There is a lack of evaluation of manuals and activities (Maldonado et a., 2021), how different food
13 education topics, such as nutrition education and environmental education interact (Lalchandani *et al.*,
14 2022), how teachers are trained (Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023), and how food education is taught
15 (Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011) and the effect of different types of food education on knowledge, behaviour
16 and outcomes of teachers or children (Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011; Smith *et al.*, 2022).
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19 From a policy perspective, research identified a significant gap in examination of the PSFEP
20 environment, especially concerning the range of actors including non-government organisations involved
21 and their role in policy development (Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023; Jones *et al.*, 2023; Love *et al.*,
22 2020). There are gaps concerning the evaluation of curriculum documents, the impact of PSFEP,
23 monitoring and evaluation, where food sits within the curriculum, curriculum content and policy
24 implementation (Classen *et al.*, 2022; Smith *et al.*, 2022). There is also a deficit in longitudinal studies
25 (Classen *et al.*, 2022), and historical analysis (McCloat and Caraher, 2019).
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42 **4. Discussion**
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44 This scoping review **sets** out to examine the extent and nature of research about primary school food
45 education policy around the world. The discussion examines the extent and nature of PSFEP research, the
46 policies analysed, which methods were used, and **recommendations made**, ending with the research gaps
47 in the field. A total of 14 papers met inclusion criteria, spanning a wide range of policies and food
48 education topics. Overall research into PSFEP represents a limited, undeveloped, and disparate field of
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literature into a range of food education forms. Crucially this review has identified ample scope for further research.

Firstly, the extent of research is limited, with most papers published after 2018. This indicates a growth of interest in food education policy and perhaps an expansion from existing research areas such as secondary school food education policy (McCombie and Hwang, 2017) school meals policy (Cohen *et al.*, 2023). The small sample in this study could be reflective of the low status of food education in schools and policymaking (Food Teachers Centre, 2023; Jamie Oliver Food Foundation, 2017). A similar issue was found in research to identify the top 10 priorities in school food system research. Despite explicitly including food education within the definition of the school FS, school meals dominated over education, potentially due to financial pressures and focus on other, higher status educational priorities (Bjørkkjær *et al.*, 2024; Schliemann *et al.*, 2024).

Methodologically, research focuses on content analysis of documents, a method widely used to analyse curriculums (Chou and Wang, 2024; Dahal *et al.*, 2025), **which is appropriate**, given it is almost impossible to conduct policy studies without using document analysis (Dalglish *et al.*, 2021). A small range of other, largely qualitative methods were employed, presenting extensive opportunities for methodological innovation, especially using quantitative analysis. Few theoretical or analytical frameworks were used in the papers **from this review, which could be related to debate about a lack theoretical basis for broader food education (Ueda, 2021). This is not the case in nutrition education which applies theory extensively (Contento, 2008; Medeiros *et al.*, 2022), and presents an opportunity to strengthen food education research by using theories and frameworks, such as Amartya Sen's capability approach (Hart and Page, 2020; Ueda, 2021).**

The scope of PSFEP extends to a range of food education forms including Home Economics, food safety, healthy eating and nutrition education within national, state and school curriculum policy. It includes specific food education topics, such as dietary guidelines and food waste plus broader forms such as Food and Nutrition Literacy and Home Economics. Although Home Economics **is predominantly a secondary**

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3 **school subject in countries such as Ireland and Australia (Pendergast *et al.*, 2022, McCloat and**
4 **Caraher, 2020)** the subject is taught at primary level **across parts of Europe (Nõmmik *et al.*, 2025).**

7 Insights and best practice could be drawn from secondary school Home Economics research and
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9 **successful food education programmes (Davis *et al.*, 2016)** to address **PSFEP development and**
10 **implementation issues.** The breadth of food education terms used demonstrates a lack of consensus
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12 about what PSFEP should be called and constitute. Although Home Economics is a term more widely
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14 used in secondary schools, nomenclature variation remains an issue in secondary education which may
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16 contribute to a dilution of the subject in national education systems (McCloat and Caraher, 2020).
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20 Secondly, this review sought to understand the policy level, policy area, and specific food education
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22 policies analysed. Food education policy was most often a national policy concern, but did include state
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24 policy as education in some countries **is a federal policy area (USA and Germany).** There was a lack of
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26 research exploring how PSFEP varies from country to country, compared to secondary school food policy
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28 analysis (Blecha *et al.*, 2025; McCloat and Caraher, 2019). One paper included an individual school's
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30 food education policy. But given some individual schools exceed national food education guidance, **even**
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32 **having an onsite cookery school (Hill, 2022), this represents an opportunity for further research**
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34 and highlights how PSFEP is made across **multiple Government levels** but does not yet consider how
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36 individual school policy approaches could go beyond national policymaking.
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40 The policy area predominantly studied was curriculum policy, which was one of the inclusion criteria,
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42 and covered how curriculum is developed (Jones *et al.*, 2023; McCloat and Caraher, 2019), and the extent
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44 or effectiveness of food education in the curriculum (Dankers *et al.*, 2020; Love *et al.*, 2020; Maldonado
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46 *et al.*, 2022; Ovca *et al.*, 2018; Smith *et al.*, 2022). However, despite school meals and environments
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48 being excluded during screening, some research studied the integration of curriculum and non-curriculum
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50 policy areas, for example how food and nutrition education can support school improvement (Classen *et*
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52 *al.*, 2022). This is a key example of how school food education policy in the curriculum is intertwined
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54 **with wider school food policy outside the curriculum, as identified by school food system mapping**
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research, which found the curriculum to be one of 4 key pillars, linked to food environments and learning (Bryant *et al.*, 2023; Cavanagh *et al.*, 2024).

Thirdly, this research aimed to find out what policy recommendations were made in PSFEP research. Only half of the studies made policy recommendations, although rarely described as **such and more often part of the discussion, rather than a distinct section**. A lack of recommendations is possibly reflective of academic debate around making policy recommendations in research (Smith and Stewart, 2017). Academics can either position themselves as a knowledge broker by disseminating evidence or extending this and advocate for certain actions by providing policy recommendations. This can be driven by personal or departmental perspectives (Cairney and Oliver, 2020) and therefore may influence whether researchers make policy recommendations in academic papers, or not.

A variety of recommendations were made under three themes: calls for PSFEP improvements such as, developing joined-up policy particularly between health and education sectors and making language in policies easier to understand (Classen *et al.*, 2022; Jones *et al.*, 2023; Love *et al.*, 2020; Maldonado *et al.*, 2021); more hours for food education in the National Curriculum (Ovca *et al.*, 2018; Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011); and implementation support in the form of funding, training, time for planning and evaluation of food education policy (da Silva Florintino, *et al.*, 2023; Love *et al.*, 2020; Ovca *et al.*, 2018; Nguyen *et al.*, 2017).

Overall, this represents a disparate policy agenda that lacks focus, **albeit congruent with calls for more joined-up policymaking that takes a holistic perspective cross government topics such as childhood (Love et al, 2022). This aligns with research recommendations calling for more focus on** and support for food education (Bjørkkjær *et al.*, 2024; Nanayakkara, *et al.*, 2024). Without policy recommendations, new ideas about a policy problem and important empirical evidence cannot contribute or public debate on the topic or help policymakers solve problems (Byman, 2024).

Fourthly, this review **aimed to** identify gaps in PSFEP research and found a **multiple opportunities**. Considering food education through the policy cycle which includes agenda setting, policy formulation, legitimisation, implementation, evaluation and policy maintenance, succession or termination (Cairney, 2019), there are gaps in research across the policy cycle. There is also a lack of research that examines policy documents, and the wider policymaking environment, such as the actors involved, networks that exist and the structural factors that exist (Cairney, 2019) which are key to understanding a policy domain. There is also an opportunity to provide evidence of how different countries approach primary school food education policy (Dankers *et al.*, 2021; Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023; Smith *et al.*, 2022) across national, regional and school level policy (Dankers *et al.*, 2021; Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023; Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011) for policymakers to learn from. School food education is unique to each country's food culture and policymaking environment (Bjørkkjær *et al.*, 2023; Ueda, 2021), but there is much to learn from different approaches, but more research is needed. Whilst collectively this research presents PSFEP as an emerging field, the small sample could also be reflective of how primary school food education lacks prioritisation across research, policy and practice (Ask, *et al.*, 2020; Jamie Oliver Food Foundation, 2017; Schliemann *et al.*, 2024). This disparate collection of research demonstrates a lack of academic focus on the policy aspect of primary school food education. The research that does exist is driven by a wide range of disciplines including nutrition, sustainability, education, and public health, but rarely by food education scholars. This potentially limits a coherent approach to wider aims and research funding opportunities, and potentially then, the volume of research commissioned and conducted.

Finally, whilst this scoping review presents evidence of an emerging **field of PSFEP research**, limitations must be noted. The systematic nature of a scoping review can restrict the papers included, as can only selecting English language papers and excluding grey literature. There was a lack of clarity in policy and food education definitions, a known issue in policy and secondary school food education research (Cairney, 2019; McCloat and Caraher, 2020), addressed with clear inclusion criteria and using

the FL framework. **Data quality was variable leading to data extraction challenges, such as some lacked information about which documents were analysed and data for primary and secondary schools was presented as one set.**

Theoretically, the novel application of a Food Literacy framework (Slater *et al.*, 2018) to PSFEP research extends the application of FL in research, whilst ensuring this review uniquely examines research from a comprehensive perspective of food education, **rather than, a narrow one.** Methodologically, employing the JBI scoping review process to examine PSFEP brings novel, and rigorous application to this emerging field.

Overall, this review provides valuable insights into the PSFEP research landscape. To the authors' knowledge, this is the first time a scoping review has been conducted to examine primary school food education research from a policy perspective, contributing new knowledge to both food education and education policy research fields. Taking a policy perspective uniquely brings together literature spanning a range of food education types, across policy levels and crucially, has identified significant scope for further research into PSFEP.

5. Recommendations

This scoping review highlighted opportunities for further development of research, policy and practice. Research about PSFEP is lacking, so calls for further research, underpinned by theories that give different perspectives could help ensure all primary school children receive the food education they need. This includes analysis of curriculum content and implementation, longitudinal studies (Classen *et al.*, 2022; Smith *et al.*, 2022) and historical analysis (McCloat and Caraher, 2019). Equally, PSFEP must be prioritised by Governments as part of a WSA to food (Bryant *et al.*, 2023). This extends to teacher training (Da Silva Florintino *et al.*, 2023), evaluation of food education resources and the different forms of food education on children's outcomes (Kostanjevec *et al.*, 2011; Smith *et al.*, 2022).

6. Conclusion

This scoping review analysed the extent and nature of the literature and establish research gaps in primary school food education policy. Using the JBI scoping review methodology, it analysed the types of policies researched, policy recommendations made, and research gaps identified. A growing body of research since 2011 has focused on food education within national and state curriculums, inherently connected to secondary education and wider education policymaking. Recommendations called for improved food education policy, implementation support and more joined up policymaking across government. Future research opportunities include understanding food education policy in other countries, the wider policy making environment, and more extensive examination of food education from a policy perspective.

Declaration of Interest:

The authors confirm that they possess no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this research.

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Author contributions:

KS designed the study, acquisition, screening, analysis, and interpretation of data, followed by drafting the paper, reviewing it critically for important intellectual content, and giving final approval of the version to be published. MS reviewed the protocol, screened papers, analysed and interpreted data, and reviewed the work critically before final approval of the version to be published. CR and RW supervised the development of the protocol design, data acquisition, and reviewed the work before final approval of the version to be published.

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PCC	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Population	Primary school children	Nursery, secondary school or adults
	Age between 4 and 11 years old	Younger than 4 and older than 11
	Any geography	None
Concept	Any form of food education including cooking, nutrition, growing, sensory food education, sustainable diets and more	Evidence about school meals and food environments
Context	Any level of policymaking including international national, regional, local, and school level	Intervention studies.
	Any policy that influences primary school food education within the school day	Policy about school meals and food education outside of the school day, for example extra curricular clubs.
	Any government department including but not limited to health, education	None
	Any policy including strategy, guidance, governance, legislation and more	None

Authors	Paper title
Classen et al., 2022	Coordinated Health in Texas Elementary Schools' Campus Improvement Plans: Analysis of Regional Differences and Trends between 2016 and 2020
Dankers et al., 2020	Food and nutrition literacy in general schools. An analysis of the framework conditions of the federal states for subject-related lessons
Da Silva Florintino et al., 2023	Analysis of the implementation of Food and Nutrition Education actions in public schools in a capital city in southern Brazil
Jones et al., 2023	Revising primary and secondary school curricula in the Caribbean to enhance education on the risks for noncommunicable diseases
Kostanjevec et al., 2011	The effects of nutrition education on 6th graders knowledge of nutrition in nine-year primary schools in Slovenia
Lalchandani et al., 2022	Content analysis of school websites: Policies and programs to support healthy eating and the environment
Love et al., 2020	Food and nutrition education opportunities within Australian primary schools
Maldonado et al., 2021	A proposal for food and nutrition education integrated into the preschool and elementary school curriculum
McCloat and Caraher, 2019	The evolution of Home Economics as a subject in Irish primary and post-primary education from the 1800s to the twenty-first century
Melnick et al., 2022	Outcomes of a Multi-Component School-Based Nutrition Program
Nakamura, 2011	Nutritional policies and dietary guidelines in Japan
Nguyen et al., 2017	Challenges to implementing the food-based dietary guidelines in the South African primary school curriculum: A qualitative study exploring the perceptions of principals and curriculum advisors
Ovca et al., 2018	Curriculum Analysis of Food Safety Competences at Elementary and Upper-Secondary Level of Formal Education Inside Food-Related Programs in Slovenia
Smith et al., 2022	How primary school curriculums in 11 countries around the world deliver food education and address food literacy: a policy analysis

Food education form	Food education type	Number	Reference
Broad	Food education	2	Nakamura, 2011; Smith et al., 2022
	Food and nutrition education	3	Da Silva Florintino et al., 2023; Love et al., 2020; Maldonado et al., 2022
	Food literacy	1	Smith et al., 2022
	Food and nutrition literacy	1	Dankers et al., 2020
	Home Economics	2	Kostanjevec et al., 2011; McCloat and Caraher, 2019
Specific	Dietary guidelines	1	Nguyen et al., 2017
	Environmental / food waste	1	Lalchandani et al., 2022
	Food safety	1	Ovca et al., 2018
	Healthy eating	1	Lalchandani et al., 2022
	Healthy and family life	1	Jones et al., 2023
	Nutrition education	2	Classen et al., 2022; Melnick et al., 2022

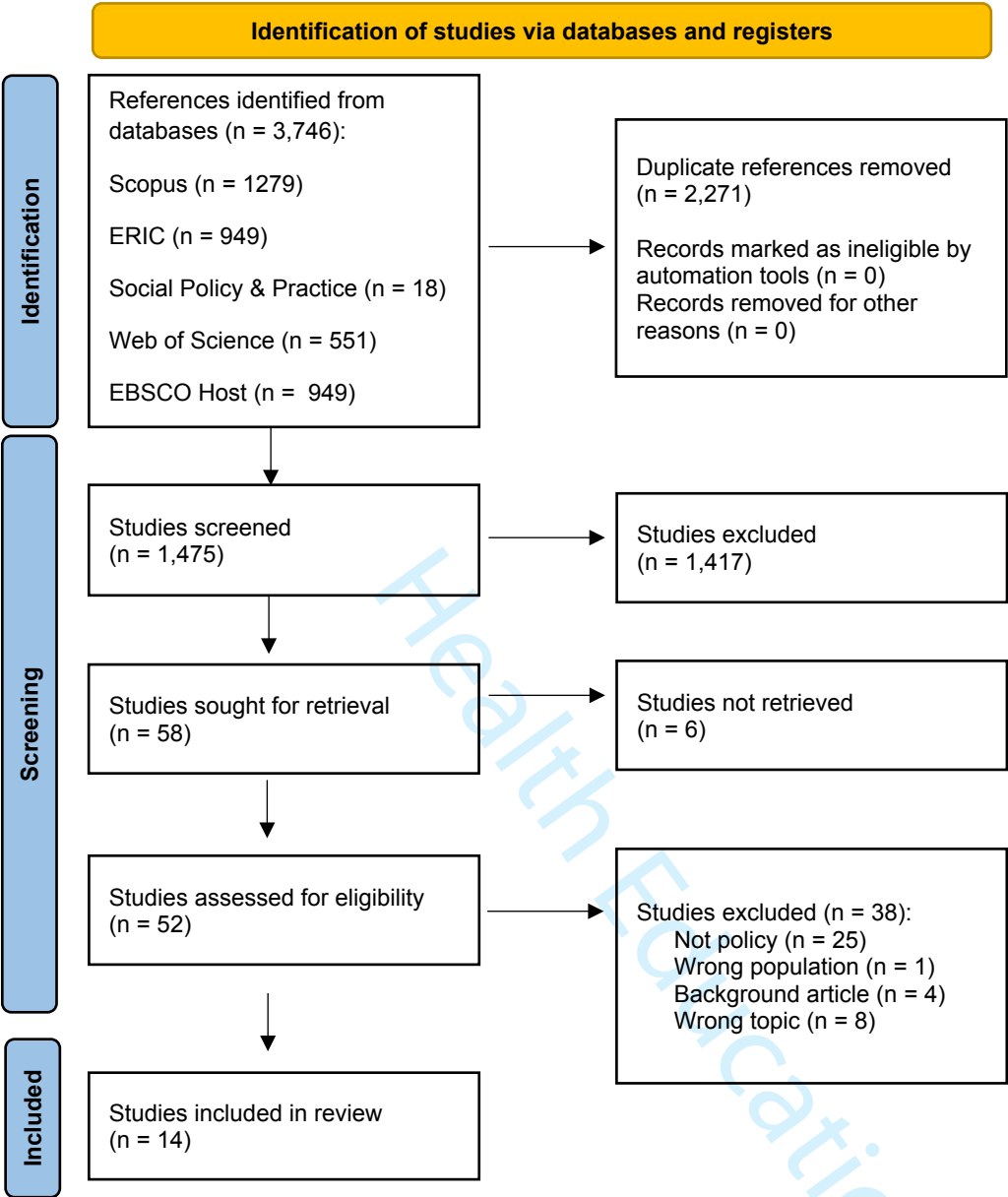


Figure 2: Timeline of published paper, country and education phase of research. Source: Authors.

