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### Experiences, Subjectivities, and Perceptions of a Group of Public-School Teachers on the School Feeding Policy in Argentina: A Qualitative Study

### Experiencias, subjetividades y percepciones de un grupo de docentes de escuelas públicas sobre la política de alimentación escolar en Argentina. Estudio cualitativo

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction.** In the current global context marked by malnutrition and challenges in food access -exacerbated by food price inflation across various countries and continents - school feeding policies hold a critical role. This article explores the experiences, subjectivities, and perceptions of a group of public-school teachers on the school feeding policy (SFP), Cordoba, Argentina, 2018.

**Methods.** This is a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach involving 18 teachers from nine public schools. In-depth interviews were conducted, and content analysis was performed.

**Results.** Nearly all participants were female. They reported daily, direct, and frequent involvement in student care within the SFP context; however, their participation was limited. Teachers perceived that their presence and support during SFP meals are their responsibility. They express negative experiences related to the nutritional quality of the food provided by the policy, though they emphasized its importance in ensuring food access. The teachers displaced some resistance to policy norms, which they expressed as complaints. They also serve as generators of social and cultural capital for students, fostering socialization, values, learning, habits formation and inclusive gender roles within the SFP context. They shared experiences and feelings about their role and expressed hopes for potential policy improvements especially concerning nutrition and a more comprehensive approach.

**Conclusions.** Teachers' participation in the SFP is limited. Within the school canteen context, teachers experience a range of positive and negative experiences, emotions, engage with student's life and express expectations for policy improvement. Despite some resistance to current norms, they seek enhancement to the policy.

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**Keywords:** Food Assistance; Child Nutrition Sciences; Community Participation; Qualitative Research; Schools.

## RESUMEN

**Introducción.** A partir del contexto actual de malnutrición y dificultades de acceso a los alimentos (inflación de precios de alimentos) reportado en diferentes países y continentes, las políticas de alimentación escolar tienen un rol central. Este artículo explora las experiencias, subjetividades y percepciones de un grupo de docentes de escuelas públicas sobre la política de alimentación escolar (PAE), Córdoba, Argentina, 2018.

**Metodología.** fue un estudio cualitativo con enfoque fenomenológico, con 18 docentes de nueve escuelas públicas. Se realizaron entrevistas en profundidad y análisis de contenido.

**Resultados.** Casi la totalidad de la muestra fue de género femenino. Refirieron un involucramiento diario, directo y frecuentemente en la atención a estudiantes en el contexto de la PAE. Sin embargo, su participación se encontró limitada. Los/as docentes sienten que su presencia y acompañamiento durante la comida proporcionada por la PAE son su responsabilidad. Experimentan experiencias negativas relacionadas con la calidad nutricional de las preparaciones brindadas por la política, aunque destacan su importancia en el acceso a los alimentos. El grupo de docentes mostró percepciones relacionadas a cierta resistencia a la norma a través de algunos reclamos y ellos son generadores de capital social y cultural junto a los estudiantes, incluyendo aspectos de socialización, valores, aprendizaje, generación de hábitos y roles de género inclusivos en el contexto de la PAE. Expresaron vivencias y sentimientos relacionados con su rol y mostraron expectativas futuras de posibles mejoras de la política en especial sobre aspectos de nutrición y visiones más integrales.

**Conclusiones.** La participación de docentes en la PAE es escasa. Dentro del contexto del comedor escolar los docentes experimentan diferentes experiencias negativas y positivas, sentimientos, expectativas y se involucran con el mundo de los estudiantes. Aunque manifiestan ciertas resistencias a las normas en pos de mejorar esta política.

**Financiamiento:** Programa de becas "Dr. Abraam Sonis" 2018, Ministerio de Salud de la Nación, Argentina. Programa "Formando UNLaM" 2019, UNLAM Argentina.

**Palabras clave.** Asistencia alimentaria; Ciencias de la nutrición infantil; Participación comunitaria; Investigación cualitativa; Escuelas.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The group of Teachers are generators of social and cultural capital alongside students within the context of the school canteen. However, their participation is limited.
- The group of teachers has different experiences within the school feeding policy, characterized by positive and negative emotions and experiences. Negative experiences were mainly associated to the poor quality of the food services provided.
- Teachers involved in implementing school feeding programs express certain resistance to the norms, reflecting their future expectations for improving the policy's contributions to students, particularly regarding nutrition and the incorporation of more comprehensive perspectives.

## INTRODUCTION

Child malnutrition in the world is alarming. According to 2020 global data, 22% of children under five years of age were found to be stunted, 6.7% were wasted and 5.7% were overweight<sup>1</sup>.

In Argentina, according to 2018 data, 41.1% of the population aged 5 to 17 years was overweight<sup>2</sup>; and it was observed that during the period 2005-2018 the proportion of low height in children under 5 years remained unchanged, around 8%<sup>2</sup>. These results are linked to social and economic variables. For example, the latest National Nutrition Survey (ENNyS 2) conducted in Argentina found that, among children and adolescents, shorter stature and low weight were inversely related to socioeconomic status. The data confirmed that daily consumption of healthy foods is significantly lower in groups with lower educational levels and incomes. This socioeconomic gradient is observed in both adults and children<sup>2</sup>. Considering a complex social and nutrition context, social protection policies, especially school feeding policies, play a central role<sup>3</sup>.

There is evidence indicating that school meals can have benefits in different spheres of student well-being, such as participation, diet quality, food security and academic performance, and with a possible protective effect on body mass index. There was also evidence of improved family income and was found to have positive impacts on height and school attendance<sup>4,5</sup>.

In Argentina, although recent data on the scope of the School Feeding Policy (SFP) is lacking, it is known that its implementation is decentralized (at the provincial and municipal level) and varies widely<sup>6</sup>, often lacking transparency in critical aspects<sup>7</sup>. The scientific literature indicates that, regardless of the regulatory framework (with/without a law on access to public information) information on school canteen policies is limited<sup>7</sup>.

During implementation, participation is an important means to ensure the construction of a food security and nutrition policy and the scope of the right to food, although there are limitations to its effective exercise<sup>8</sup>.

The participation of various social groups, especially civil society, has been instrumental in bringing food issues to the public agenda, as seen in countries as Brazil. A study has shown that, from the perspective of the participants, such involvement is a mean of ensuring that the benefits of the Food and Nutritional Security policy reach the community, as well as a way of contributing to public policy development and social oversight. However, the same study highlights only partial participation, noting that civil society advisors, who are meant to represent and defend the interests of the entities and people they represent, often pursue their personal interests, or legitimize decisions that benefit that benefit public authorities, thus contributing to maintain the status quo. Another limitation identified this study points to democratic culture that is still limited<sup>8</sup>.

Different studies have demonstrated the positive effects of including participation in different health and nutrition interventions and policies; in special, in the acceptance and sustainability<sup>9,10</sup>. In a study conducted in Vietnam, differences in multidimensional child growth were observed when community participation occurred during the design stage of the interventions<sup>9</sup>.

Even though the SFP are one of the most important social programs in Latin America and are primarily aimed at vulnerable populations<sup>11</sup>, research on SFP implementation from the stakeholders' perspective and using a participatory and holistic approach is, to our knowledge, worryingly scarce in the region. This study aims to explore the experiences, subjectivities, and perceptions of public-school teachers regarding the School Feeding Policy (SFP) in Cordoba, Argentina, in 2018.

## METHODS

### *Study type*

This study had a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach<sup>12</sup>, which allowed us to explore the meanings around the experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders about the SFP. We follow the guideline and recommendation for qualitative studies<sup>13</sup>.

The social phenomenology approach focuses on the description of the significant experiences of the subjects, endowed with subjectivity and experienced in interpersonal relationships<sup>12,14-16</sup>.

From Alfred Schutz's<sup>12</sup> perspective, understanding the meaning of human action is based on existential reasons. The reasons that refer to the lived experience, contextualized through the knowledge inventory, are called "reasons why", while those related to the objectives to be achieved are called "reasons for".

Intentional action is based on conscious experiences. Teachers' social action in the school including accompanying students and being part of the school food act. From this perspective, the phenomenological approach is adequate to analyze the experiences of key stakeholders directly involved in school feeding policy (SFP) daily. From this perspective, it is assumed that the school feeding and the food process are social phenomenon in which many forms of relationship coexist.

This study aimed to explore, from the teachers' perspective, four major dimensions (or concepts) that were analysed and interpreted using a phenomenological theoretical approach<sup>12</sup> (Table 1) and adapted to the phenomenon under investigation: perceiving the context of the SFP and participation<sup>17</sup>; experiences and responsibilities of care in the school canteen; intersubjectivity when interacting with others in everyday life (with focus on children's quality of life and nutrition)<sup>18,19</sup>, and expectations. For the dimension of participation<sup>20</sup>, both pre-established and emerging categories were included.

### *Setting and participants*

The study was conducted during 2018 and developed within the framework of the system of municipal educational institutions of the city of Córdoba, Argentina. This system is made up of initial, primary schools and adult centres in peripheral contexts with different degrees of social vulnerability<sup>21</sup>. In this area, a school canteens service is carried out and includes lunch rations, a glass of milk (breakfast and/or snack) and special diets.

For this work, the place of study is not a physical space, but a conceptual context, in which experiences are lived, and the phenomenon occur<sup>14</sup>.

Field entry was conducted through a dynamic process with the research team playing an active role. Before starting the project, meetings and contact were established with various stakeholders directly involved in the implementation of municipal school canteens (the study's focus) including central level program representatives. Authorization to conduct the study within selected schools was obtained, followed by visits to these schools, where connections, were made with principals, secretaries, school canteen staff and teachers. Also, the part research team had prior experience in this study context from a research project implemented in 2013<sup>22</sup> and another study in 2018<sup>23</sup>.

The units of analysis were primary school teachers who were intentionally selected from nine municipal schools located at different levels of social and economic vulnerability.

To define the selection of schools, the proxy variable was the overcrowding levels on households of the neighbourhood where they are located. This variable was stratified into levels of overcrowding, to define minimum quotas of schools, as proposed in a previous study<sup>23</sup>.

Within each school, informants who have experienced the phenomenon were selected by both a combination of convenience and saturation sampling. Data collection stopped once data saturation was reached for the big dimensions identified, and it was determined that no new significant information was emerging from the interviews.

Informants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: presence in the school under analysis for at least the last six months, coverage of different school shifts, voluntary participation in the study, and regular attendance at the school canteen for at least one of the meals provided. This last inclusion criterion was particularly relevant, as teachers are responsible for the care and accompaniment of children during the various meals provided in the SFP within the study context.

**Table 1. Analytical dimensions of the study**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description and categories</b>
Perceiving the context of the SFP and participation	Related to the type of power structure where teachers are involved, the role of teachers in politics and the possibility of influencing, and participation linked to the SFP, is a process through which people can actively and genuinely participate in defining the issues that concern them, including policy formulation and implementation. Categories: organization and participation.
Experiences and responsibilities of care in the school canteen	What obligations/actions teachers are expected to assume regarding student care were addressed and how they live it. Categories: Obligation and roles.
Intersubjectivity when interacting with others in everyday life	The teacher recognizes in his or her life world the existence of peers with whom he or she interacts daily, and from where emotions emerge. Also, become aware of the world of students who attend the school canteen, especially their quality of life and nutrition. Categories: interactions and feelings, worlds of their students, and negative and positive experiences.
Expectations	About the SFP from the perspective of the informants. Categories: quality of nutritional services and comprehensive learning space.

#### *Data collection techniques and instruments*

The interviewees were invited to participate in this study in person within the school context itself. The data was collected through in-depth interviews in face-to-face or telephone sessions lasting between 20 to 40 minutes with the support of a guide of open-ended questions with a component of semi-structured questions. The interviews were conducted in Spanish by two researchers trained (DLM and ERR).

The interview instrument was based on the following sections: sociodemographic characteristics; semi-structured questions on participation practices (in three sub-sections), adapted from a previous study<sup>20</sup>; open questions about perceptions including expectations.

Data collection was completed in a 3-month period between October and December 2018. No participants were found who, after contacting them and inviting them to participate, and who have responded to this invitation, then refused or abandoned the study.

#### *Data analysis*

The information obtained was recorded through field notes and audio recordings, which were carefully transcribed following each interview. The qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis technique from a directed approach, using ATLAS.ti software alongside with the manual information coding technique.



In 2023, for this study and from a phenomenological approach<sup>12</sup>, qualitative data analysis was conducted through the following steps: first, written transcripts were coded according to the main dimensions addressed; then, specific information was distinguished and grouped to identify emerging elements; finally, information from dimensions and categories was compared and synthesized. This process was carried out by the first author (DLM).

The selected textual quotations of the participants' opinions were selected and included in this manuscript to illustrate the findings. To protect the identity of the informants and guarantee anonymity we only provide information on gender and school trajectories.

Communication was established with the participants through WhatsApp and calls, leaving an open channel of communication for queries, evacuating doubts, giving the participants the opportunity to clarify, change or expand on any idea provided during the development of the interview.

To improve the internal validity of the study, all transcripts were reviewed at least twice, and a second independent investigator revised the information and the validation of preliminary report of results. Both investigators met to discuss the findings.

#### *Ethical considerations*

The study was evaluated and approved by the Institutional Health Research Ethics Committee of the "Hospital Nacional de Clínicas" of the National University of Cordoba, Argentina (RHNC N° 3575/2018). Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants signed a consent form after having been exhaustively informed and having understood the information and the confidentiality of the information was guaranteed.

## **RESULTS**

The sample consisted of 18 key stakeholders from nine schools. Of the sample, 94.5% were female, 50% belonged to the morning shift and 61.2% reported having been in the municipal primary school system for more than 5 years (Table 2).

The results obtained from the content analysis are presented below and were organized into four main dimensions and their emerging categories (Table 1), which were included in their entirety regardless of the number of participants who mentioned them.

In the dimensions of analysis, no marked differences were found in the perceptions associated with specific characteristics of the participants, such as age, gender, school trajectories or school context, so we opted for a grouped data analysis.

The results reported below can be expanded in the supplementary material ([Supplementary material 2](#), <https://www.renhyd.org/renhyd/article/view/2265/1300>).

**Table 2.** Sociodemographic Characteristics of Key School stakeholders Under Analysis, 2018 (n=18)

Characteristics	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	1	5.5
Female	17	94.5
<b>Age (years)</b>		
From 30 to 39	8	44.4
From 40	10	55.6
<b>Level of overcrowding in the school context*</b>		
Low	7	38.9
Medium	4	22.2
High	7	38.9
<b>School attendance shift</b>		
Morning	9	50.0
Afternoon	8	44.4
Morning and afternoon	1	0.6
<b>History within the current school</b>		
Less than a year	5	27.8
From 1 to 5 years	6	33.3
From 6 years	7	38.9
<b>History within the municipal schools</b>		
Less than a year	1	5.5
From 1 to 5 years	6	33.3
6 years or more	11	61.2

\*According to variable levels of overcrowding in the neighbourhood where the school is located (households with more than three persons per room) in terciles of number of households. Categories: Low (tercile 1): up to 34 households. Medium (tercile 2): more than 34 up to 106 households. High (tercile 3): more than 106 households.

### Perceiving the context of the SFP and participation

They were aware of the school canteen, stating that they attend it every day during lunchtime together with the students. All teachers reported that the *organization* of SFP are defined by the government entity and executed through private companies, with limited channels to

influence improvements, this is always through the person in charge of the SFP from the school, but they do not interact or do not know the other stakeholders involved in the decisions, only in some isolated cases.

There were few notions of the *participation* in the context of the SFP, as well as the right to access information about it and associative participation. Although some suggest that they have a predisposition to participate, but the system is “very closed”.

*“No, not as a right, I think there is a right that includes even the obligation of the teachers because that is also what they tell us, that is, we, for example, have a whole protocol that perhaps does not exist as a part of the right, but it is more of an obligation where we must participate in the canteen instances, doing all this, controlling the state of the food, also watching the children how they eat, trying to form healthy habits when eating, drinking water, forming spaces to sit with the children and eat with them the same food, that is, there is a regulation that maybe you saw the right...”* (Woman, teacher of the morning shift, 4 years in the municipal schools).

### **Experiences and responsibilities of care in the school canteen**

The *obligations* that teachers are expected to assume were based on “supervision” or “control” and accompaniment to students during mealtimes. The presence during this moment is mandatory.

Permanence in the program would be related to the student's attendance at the canteen. This fact was not isolated but was strongly linked to his role within the school canteen. The supervision that the children “eat” and thus be able to remain within the program. Some teachers feel that students often feel obliged to eat in the canteen.

They even stated that they must persuade the students or negotiate with them to accept the food. This aspect was linked to reasons related to the permanence of the students within the program and the perception of need of some children, with food in the dining room possibly being the most important they receive.

*“Many times, the child says no, I don't eat that, I don't like that, my tummy hurts and we, knowing that the families count on them having lunch at school, persuade them, chat with them and try to say yes or yes. have lunch because we know that when they return home, they do not have that lunch or at least we believe that is the case...”*. (Woman, teacher of the morning shift, 10 years in the municipal schools).

They expressed that the students are their responsibility during school meals. Themselves manifested that there are some aspects related to their practices that generate ideas of contradiction, for example, they express that impart knowledge of healthy eating but then the school meals offer foods that are not part of these definitions.

Another key aspect is the role of the teacher as a mediator between school feeding, the preferences of the children and the family.

during implementation, it was generally observed that there were no questions about the organization carried out by the private company. With this, the teaching *role* in school meals becomes rationalized and without surprises. Although it was not something general, some teachers have reported having experienced complains about the quality of the food provided. Something interesting is that the role of “claiming” was highlighted to achieve better quality of food services.

*“We have always talked about it in teacher meetings in some workshops as if proposing, making the issue more “collegial” than it has not been so punctual. We are all a little attentive to the issue of food quality...no, not here. In another school yes... because of the quality of the food, I remember that in (name the school) they blocked the street and so on” (Man, teacher of the morning shift, 10 years in the municipal schools).*

Also, some teachers expressed concern about the link between the food offered by the school meals, the body and health. Some recalled issues from their own biography, related to food at school.

### **Intersubjectivity when interacting with others in everyday life**

The teachers recognize their daily lives and *interactions* within the context of the school meals, along with the students, and other stakeholders involved, such as the children's family, the kitchen staff, and stakeholders from the private company, the State, and the school. (Other teaching peers who fulfil the same function, directors, secretaries, etc.).

Different *feelings* emerged related to their experiences and responsibility, be aware such as feeling “sorry” or “tired”. They also manifest being conscious about the subject of the quality of the food.

*“At first it did score, but you also get tired because if you talk to an adult, they are the parents, and you tell them. For example: I have a child who is on a diet, and I get tired of telling the mother “Mom, your child doesn't eat, he doesn't eat the diet”, so what happens if the adult doesn't understand...” (Man, teacher of the morning shift, 10 years in the municipal schools).*

Although feelings of doubt were also observed regarding the foods offered and expressions of desire that something could change were expressed, some emphasized that the situation of low nutritional quality of foods may be related to costs.

On the other hand, they assume their responsibility for caring for the students beyond the classroom during school mealtimes, where the teacher perceives the nutritional needs of each student in his or her care.

This was evident in their perspective, where they perceived two different “worlds” among their students. One group relied on school meals as a necessity, while the other ones consider this as a part of the family dynamic.

*“I think that, yes, because let's suppose the most serious case that the food is tasteless or whatever, there are families that it is the only meal they receive in the day, as there is a great majority that sends them having the resources at home, they send them anyway. But I know that there are families that it is the only meal they have during the day, so it seems to me that in that sense it favours them, even if later we discuss whether it is tasty, whether it has nutrients or not...”* (Woman, teacher of the afternoon and morning shifts, first year in municipal schools).

The principal *negative experiences* they have had around the school meals, they were not only linked were linked to the aspects of nutritional and organoleptic quality but also to the food waste that is generated, mostly linked to preparations that they do not like and therefore that are not consumed.

*“There are foods that I really don't know what they contain, I don't know the origin... because you don't know what they are made of... the beef in a baked “milanesa”, which used to come 2 times a week or 3, comes once a month or every other month; then the meat is supplanted by other products that we cannot deduce that it is because it is a schnitzel made of soy and a mixture of other products that I don't know what it is...”* (Woman, teacher of the afternoon shift, 12 year in municipal schools).

As *positive experiences* stood out their visions as a teacher, person and as generators of cultural capital, the promotion of different aspects beyond the food itself, such socialization, creation of habits, values and practices such as share, dialogue, learn, and bonds of friendship between genders.

### **Expectations about the school feeding policy**

When the informants were asked about what they would change in the SFP their responses focused on related to the *quality of nutritional services*. They based this argument on aspects such as: the food is not tasty or pleasant, presence processed foods, a lot of carbohydrates, poor cooking, little variety, few vegetables, and/or lack of nutrients.

*“...a little more salad, I think. Not so much potato, I think not. Carrot... it has to do with the way they bring it, I don't really know how it is preserved, for example, they can make a tomato salad, if they leave at 11 in the morning and arrive here at 12 noon or they leave from where they prepare it at 10 a.m., it will not arrive in a good state, it also has to do with it and I understand that, but perhaps they can vary in some other things...”* (Woman, morning shift teacher, 8 month within municipal schools).

However, some expectations related to how a *comprehensive learning space* can be built in the school canteen were highlighted. Some expectations emerged related to the willingness

of teachers to incorporate this topic into study hours and aspirations to be able to generate a pedagogical project articulated. Some have even remembered past projects related to these ideas.

*“No important changes, but observations that we can provide... the possibility of adding the teachers in a pedagogical project and joining the work of the canteens or articulating with the kiosk that also works at the school... all related to specific projects...”* (Woman, afternoon shift teacher, 12 years in municipal schools).

## DISCUSSION

### *Main findings*

The results obtained showed the teachers have a key role in SFP context, showing future expectations related to improvements and comprehensive visions. They showed experiences and feelings directly related to this complex space and the interactions that are generated.

As in this study, the literature indicates the benefits of the SFP to multiple dimensions of well-being<sup>4,5,24</sup>. Although, to our knowledge, there are few apparent studies in the Latin-American Region and Argentina, that highlight these contributions in a comprehensive approach.

### *Comparison with other studies*

Regarding teacher's participation practices, and like similar previous study<sup>8</sup>, this work revealed that participation in daily life, is limited. For teachers to move beyond mere implementation and become more engaged, it is essential for them to recognize that the the SFP's contribution goes beyond the mere provision of food.

As highlighted in this study and in a previous one<sup>25</sup>, the SFP plays a central role in providing access to food and helping the family economy, especially for the most vulnerable children. There are also precedents published in Brazil on the contribution of SFP to food security<sup>26,27</sup>. However, the vulnerability and trajectory of the children attending the canteen are experienced through different emotions in the teachers. This may also have to do with what the life situation of each teacher has been like during their training and previous experiences. Also, as evidenced in this research, there are barriers during the implementation of school feeding policies, and even more so from a healthy perspective<sup>28</sup>, linked mainly to the characteristics of the menus provided, where teachers manifest them as negative experiences.

Possibly the menus offered are extremely distant from the tastes of the students, reinforced by preparations that are not delicious or appetizing as the teachers expressed. That is, relevant aspects within the act of eating, such as tastes and habitus, have not been considered<sup>29</sup>.

Another aspect related to concerns about food quality in the services was the inclusion of processed foods (such as processed meats) in the menus which raised concerns among teachers. The perception of low service quality is supported by recent quantitative studies published in Brazil and Argentina<sup>22,23,30,31</sup>.

An important finding was the observed similarity between teachers' resistance to norms, their expectations, and the perceived reality of their teaching experience.

The organization and implementation of school canteen and therefore school feeding is defined by the government entity and private capital company. Based on what was observed in this work, it can be postulated that the school feeding is assumed as a normalizing processes<sup>32,33</sup>; where some resistance to the norm was observed on the part of teachers, mainly at the time of claiming nutritional improvements in the services provided.

Some teachers also expressed ideas related to the standardized "menus" offered, and how these "changed over time", the game of replacements linked to lowering costs, monotonous and always the "same". That is, it consists of a normalized environment "cheap food, standardized and delocalized production and consumption"<sup>32</sup>. However, as observed in our work, resistance, and opposition such as through the generation of different practices and social and cultural capital around school feeding promoted by teachers.

The tense situations that teachers face when students do not accept certain foods, linked to negative emotions, also it could be linked to "normalizing society"<sup>32,33</sup> of diet within food assistance programs, although this result should be explored in depth in future studies.

### *Strengths and limitations*

Among the limitations of this work, it should be noted that the results cannot be generalized to a broader population or to other important stakeholders, such school meals staff, children, and their families. Additionally, the possibility of a social complacency bias be ruled out. Nevertheless, in field of food and nutritional policies, it is essential to expand critical-reflective thinking and approach the core of phenomena that arise in this context.

Due to time and feasibility constraints, interviews were conducted both in person and by telephone. While the latter could introduce potential information biases, it is worth noting that initial contacts and first interactions with most interviewed teachers were conducted in person. Moreover, the research team actively engaged in fieldwork within the schools and classrooms from which teachers were initially selected, as part of a broader research project. The results of this study can serve as a basis for future definitions of school feeding policies that better reflect the needs and realities of the community where they are implemented.

Further research is needed to explore the subjective aspects and daily experiences in the school canteen from the perspective of other stakeholders beyond teachers. Additionally, future longitudinal studies could contribute to understanding how these experiential processes evolve over time and assess the impact of these initiatives from a participation approach.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study provides insights into the process of teachers' involvement in the SFP based on their subjectivities. Teachers' participation in this policy is limited, and they have little influence over potential changes and improvements. In their daily routines within the school canteen context, teachers experience a range of positive and negative emotions, feelings, and expectations, and they are deeply engaged with students' lives. They express certain degree of resistance to existing norms and expectations to improve this policy, particularly in terms of enhancing nutritional contributions and adopting more comprehensive approaches to school feeding.

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## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

The authors declare that there were no conflicts of interest.

## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

DLM and NRP designed the study. DLM and ERR collected the data. DLM, ERR and NRP sought funding. Data analysis and interpretation was performed by DLM. DLM and ERR reviewed the



results. Writing of the original draft was performed by DLM and revisions of the manuscript by DLM, ERR, NRP. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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