Parents’ & young adults’ perceptions of secondary school food education in Australia

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Introduction

• A radical change in dietary patterns

• High & frequent use of highly processed foods

• Reasons:
  – low cost
  – heavy marketing
  – convenience
  – time scarcity
  – low food preparation skills

• Risk factor for cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, & obesity
• Many other food related problems
  – e.g. world hunger, food waste, environmental pollution

• Food education is of utmost importance!

• Schools have been identified as ideal settings
Australian Curriculum
sets the goal for what all students should learn [https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/](https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/)

Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority
Develop & implement

- **Victorian Curriculum (Foundation – 10 curriculum)**
  - incorporates the Australian Curriculum
  - reflects Victorian standards & priorities

- **Victorian Certificate of Education (years 11 & 12)**
Introduction cont....

• In Australia food education is provided by different subjects
  – food technology, food studies, home economics

• Varied in content & pedagogical approaches

• Elective subjects
Introduction cont....

• School food education faces challenges!
  – inadequate resources & time allocation
  – lack of student & parental interest
  – insufficient support from school administration
  – competition with other subjects
  – lack of qualified staff


**Introduction cont....**

- Stakeholders’ opinions
  - restructuring of school food education policies

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<tr>
<th>Food system professionals</th>
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<th>Senior secondary school teachers</th>
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<th>Parents &amp; young adults</th>
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Introduction cont....

• Lack of young adults’ & parents’ opinions

- Recent learning experiences
- Interest in prompting healthy lifestyles of their children
Aims

• To explore young adults’ & parents’ views of secondary school food education

• To compare respondents’ opinions across gender & previous learning of food-related subjects
Methods

• Design: online cross-sectional survey

• Participants: young adults (18-30 years) parents of young people (12-25 years)

• Representative sample of Australian population
  – by gender, age, State of residence, & education
Should food education be compulsory in all secondary schools?

How much school time should be spent each week on food education in secondary schools?

Is it important to have a non-compulsory food & nutrition subject for years 11 & 12?

Why it’s important to have a food & nutrition subject?
Methods cont....

• Pre-testing

• Administration
  – International market research company, early 2017

• Data analysis
  – Cross-tabulation to examine bivariate associations
  – Leximancer analysis (automatic qualitative data analysis software)
Results

Total = 1086

- Studied food subjects: 30% vs. 70%
- Not studied food subjects: 47% vs. 53%
- Year 12 or equivalent: 21%
- TAFE or trade qualification: 29%
- University: 38%
- Other countries: 78% vs. 22%
## Compulsory food education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
<th>Young adults (%)</th>
<th>Parents (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>57</td>
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<td>Year 8</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>Year 9</td>
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<td>Year 10</td>
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<td>Year 11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total = 84%

82% vs. 85%
Compulsory food education

should be compulsory in
✓ all secondary schools**
✓ years 7, 8, and 9*

Studied food subjects

should be compulsory in
✓ all secondary schools**
✓ years 8 and 9**

*p<0.05, **p<0.01
Time allocation for food education (1-3 hours per week)

Total = 69%

74% vs. 67%*

73% vs. 64%**

74% vs. 65%**

*p<0.05, **p<0.01
Non-compulsory food & nutrition subject for years 11 & 12

Total = 77%

82% vs. 77%

82% vs. 74%**

81% vs. 76%*

*p<0.05, **p<0.01
Non-compulsory food & nutrition subject for years 11 & 12
Theme 1: Healthy food patterns
Theme 1: Healthy food patterns

• Understand importance of healthy food patterns

• Make informed decisions over food

“[.....] provide a more comprehensive understanding of how we are fuelling our bodies, & the necessity of doing so in a healthy and sustainable way”. (Young adult/ Female)
Theme 2: Cooking skills
Theme 2: Cooking skills

- Develop food selection and preparation skills

“Students are about to enter the workforce & possibly move out of home, so they need to know how to buy & prepare nutritious meals”.
(Parent/ Female)

- Lack of parents’ cooking skills & time for food mentoring
Theme 3: Life skills
Theme 3: Life skills

• Provide life skills
  – E.g. Food selection, food budgeting, cooking, socialisation

• Enhance students’ confidence

• Prepare them for future independent lives

“They are at an age where they plan on going to college/university & will need basic life skills such as cooking & nutrition to look after themselves & be self-reliant”. (Young adult/ Female)
Theme 4: Status of food & nutrition subject
Theme 4: Status of food & nutrition subject

• For students who
  – want to learn more about food
  – interested in food & nutrition related courses
  – wish to pursue a career in food & nutrition
Strengths

• Large representative, national sample of young adults & parents

• Insights into the ways food education might be adopted in Australian secondary schools
Implications for research and practice

• A gap between
  – respondents’ views of school food education and practice

• Parents’ & young adults’ views
  – design & administration of school food education

• Public support for improvement of food education
  – encouraging for those who are trying to raise its status
Implications for research and practice

• Parents & young adults enlist to provide food education to younger generation
  – food clubs, cooking competitions, role modelling

• Further research
  – better utilize, complement or enrich school food education
Conclusions

• Appreciation of secondary school food education

• Parents and young people favour:
  – compulsory food education in years 7 to 10
  – 1-3 hours per week for food education
  – non-compulsory food & nutrition subjects in years 11 & 12
Acknowledgment

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