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Reconstructing the past to understand the present: a historical-political-conceptual essay on food and nutritional education in Brazil

Reconstruindo o passado para compreender o presente: um ensaio histórico-político-conceitual da educação alimentar e nutricional no Brasil

Abstract

This theoretical essay aims to analyze the historical, political, and conceptual trajectory of Food and Nutrition Education (FNE) in Brazil and to foster a critical reflection on the development of FNE as it is known today. The concept of FNE, currently defined by the Food and Nutrition Education Reference Framework (FNERF) for Public Policies, reflects an intersectoral, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and continuous practice that promotes autonomy and encompasses all life cycles and aspects of eating behavior. The transformation of FNE in Brazil results from the influence of various fields, sectors, and actors that have shaped and continue to shape practices and proposals in this domain. This article discusses the influence of hygienist patriarchy on the emergence of FNE, highlighting its mediation through debates on hunger and worker productivity. Furthermore, it examines the intersection between health promotion and FNE, which has been reinforced by the publication of the FNERF.

Keywords: Food and Nutrition Education; Food and Nutrition Security; Public Policy; Health Policy.

Resumo

Este ensaio teórico visa analisar a trajetória histórica, política e conceitual da Educação Alimentar e Nutricional (EAN) no Brasil e fomentar uma reflexão crítica para a formação da EAN como a conhecemos hoje. O conceito de EAN, atualmente definido pelo Marco de Referência de Educação Alimentar e Nutricional (MREAN) para Políticas Públicas, reflete uma prática intersetorial, multiprofissional, transdisciplinar, e contínua, que promove a autonomia e abrange todos os ciclos da vida e aspectos do comportamento alimentar. A transformação da EAN no Brasil é resultado da influência de uma variedade de campos, setores e atores que têm moldado e continuam a moldar as práticas e propostas nesse campo. O artigo apresenta a influência do patriarcado higienista no advento da EAN, destacando a mediação pelas discussões acerca da fome e na produtividade dos trabalhadores. Analisa,

ainda, a intersecção com a promoção da saúde e EAN, fortalecida com a publicação do MREAN.

Palavras-chave: Educação Alimentar e Nutricional; Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional; Políticas Públicas. Política de Saúde.

INTRODUCTION

A critical understanding of the present requires in-depth knowledge of historical processes and events. It is not limited merely to the memorization of dates and facts, but rather involves the development of analytical capacity. When the past is examined from a historical perspective, immersed in the sociopolitical and geographic context of its time, its meanings become clearer.

These meanings make it possible to understand the trajectory of events and to identify deep connections between the past and the present, as well as projections for the future. Humanity carries a historical legacy that demands understanding, which is essential for recognizing the very time in which we live. Therefore, the field of Food and Nutrition Education (FNE) is no exception.

Much has been experienced, reflected upon, criticized, deconstructed, and reconstructed in order to reach the current understanding of FNE. To achieve this, it is necessary to examine the historical, political, and conceptual developments within the Brazilian context in order to obtain a critical and reflective understanding of this broad field of knowledge in food and nutrition. This is the objective of the present essay.

Hygienist Patriarchy: The Origins of Food and Nutrition Education

Looking back to the early twentieth century, the first records related to FNE in Brazil can be identified.¹ During this period, the pedagogical movement known as the *Escola Nova* (New School), or *escolanovismo*, transformed the Brazilian educational landscape. This approach represented a significant shift from the elitist traditional teaching methods prevalent at the time.² Its central premise was the promotion of secular, free, and universal education aimed at restructuring the country's educational system. The *Escola Nova* movement emphasized the development of individuals as active citizens.² Furthermore, it promoted health education as a strategy to improve the general physical conditions of the population.³

In 1927, the *I Conferência Nacional de Educação* (First National Conference on Education), held in Curitiba, debated theses that shaped the direction of education in Brazil. Among them was the emphasis on hygienic education as essential for society, associating poor hygiene with poverty and unproductive labor.⁴

Within this historical context, marked strongly by hygienist and eugenic perspectives, Boog¹ describes the initial incorporation of food as a central element in educational interventions within schools. As the profession of nutritionist did not yet exist, discussions and practices related to food were developed almost exclusively from a medical perspective.

A notable example was the physician Antonio Ferreira de Almeida Júnior (1892–1971), who developed one of the earliest educational materials on food education, titled *Cartilha de Higiene* (Hygiene Primer), published in 1922. The booklet presented several recommendations organized around three pillars: the school environment, the teacher's example, and hygienic practices. At that time, the understanding of FNE focused primarily on strict guidance related to hygiene practices - hence the use of the term "*food education*". The broader cultural, social, and behavioral dimensions of eating, which are recognized today, were not yet incorporated into this perspective.⁵

Another influential figure of this period was Pedro Escudero (1887–1963), an Argentine physician responsible for formulating the four laws of nutrition, which stated that a healthy and balanced diet should be guided by quantity, quality, harmony, and adequacy.⁶

In Brazil, the physician Francisco Pompêo do Amaral (1907–1990) played a leading role during this period and was responsible for creating the first course in the field of Food and Nutrition.⁷ The *Curso de Dietética* (Dietetics Course), established in 1939, included two tracks: *Dietética para Donas de Casa* (Dietetics for Housewives) and *Auxiliares em Alimentação* (Food Service Assistants). These initiatives were developed within the context of educational programs that reinforced the gender roles prevalent at the time, while access to higher education remained largely restricted, primarily reserved for men. In the same year, the Nutrition Course was established at the *Faculdade de Higiene* (Faculty of Hygiene), currently known as the *Faculdade de Saúde Pública da Universidade de São Paulo – USP* (School of Public Health at the University of São Paulo).⁸

Despite this early institutionalization of food and nutrition science in Brazil, academic curricula did not yet include the discipline of Food and Nutrition Education, referred to at the time as *Educação Nutricional* (Nutrition Education) or *Educação Alimentar* (Food Education).⁷

Food Education vs. Nutrition Education: Hunger and Labor as Central Themes

Considering the political context of the period, at the federal level during the government of Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945), the *Serviço Central de Alimentação* (Central Food Service) was established by Josué de Castro, a physician and public health scholar who played a key role in defining hunger as a social, political, and economic problem.¹ In his work *Geografia da Fome* (*Geography of Hunger*), published in 1946, he analyzed these issues and proposed solutions based on international cooperation, agrarian reform, and food education.⁹

In 1940, the *Serviço Central de Alimentação* (Central Food Service) was replaced by the *Serviço de Alimentação da Previdência Social – SAPS* (Social Security Food Service).¹⁰ Its primary objective was to provide low-cost meals to workers through *restaurante populares* (popular restaurants).¹¹ One year after the creation of SAPS, the service also began to assume an educational role related to the dietary practices of workers and their families. This development created the need for communication strategies to promote the benefits that workers would gain from adopting diets grounded in the scientific principles of nutrition,¹⁰ with the ultimate aim of increasing labor productivity.

It is important to note that from the publication of Pedro Escudero's nutritional laws until the end of the *Estado Novo* during the Vargas era, the social orientation of food education initiatives focused on correcting inappropriate dietary habits. These initiatives were largely based on the assumption that the population's lack of knowledge about food was the primary cause of dietary problems.¹²

Advancing within this historical and political trajectory of FNE, the international context of the Cold War and the process of industrialization had profound effects on several social issues in Brazil, including food and nutrition.¹ With the end of the Vargas era, General Eurico Gaspar Dutra assumed the presidency, continuing many of the labor policies established by the previous government.¹³

Amid these political transformations, the military regime established in 1964 significantly altered the trajectory of *Educação Nutricional* (Nutrition Education) in Brazil. During this period, a more rationalized and technocratic perspective on food emerged, diminishing the previously more prominent social perspective. L'Abbate¹⁴ describes that “the measures adopted prioritized food supplementation, the rationalization of the food production system, and actions aimed at combating specific nutritional deficiencies.”

The authoritarian government of the military regime also strengthened ties with the food industry, demonstrating strong interest in innovation and research in the field of food technology, particularly through programs focused on food supplementation that aligned with the measures described by L'Abbate.¹⁴

This context contributed to the decline of Nutrition Education within governmental actions and proposals.¹⁵ Conversely, it stimulated the expansion of professional training in nutrition, particularly during the following two decades.¹ This expansion was influenced by the *II Plano Nacional de Desenvolvimento* – II PND (Second National Development Plan), which included among its objectives the strengthening and qualification of the workforce in nutrition.¹⁶

During the 1970s, the *Instituto Nacional de Alimentação e Nutrição* – INAN (National Institute of Food and Nutrition) was established with the aim of formulating public policies in the field.¹⁷ In the same decade, the *Estudo Nacional de Despesa Familiar* – ENDEF (National Study of Family Expenditures), conducted in 1975 by the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* – IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), identified caloric deficit associated with insufficient income as a central feature of the Brazilian population's food-related problems. Consequently, the complex determinants of food-related problems came to be reduced primarily to poverty.¹⁸

Within this context, *Educação Nutricional* (Nutrition Education) came to be criticized and, in some cases, rejected, as it was often used as a strategy to teach low-income populations how to cope with food scarcity. This approach was criticized for undermining the notion of food sovereignty among the population.^{1, 15, 19} It is also important to note that the “banishment” of Nutrition Education from public policy agendas was strongly influenced by economic analyses conducted during that period.¹

At the same time, the field of education itself was undergoing debates regarding proposals for transformative and emancipatory education. Analyses such as those by Saviani² suggested that educators were increasingly perceived as participants in the exploitative dynamics of the capitalist system. These conditions contributed to the absence of Nutrition Education from state policies, programs, and initiatives in the decades that followed.

In contrast, within the academic sphere, studies and publications in the field of *Educação Nutricional* (Nutrition Education) began to emerge during the 1970s and 1980s.²⁰ Despite the unfavorable political and economic climate for educational initiatives related to food and nutrition, the professional field of nutrition recognized educational activities and research in Nutrition Education as essential professional competencies.¹

By the early 1990s, although the context remained challenging for Nutrition Education initiatives, the profession of nutritionist was formally regulated through *Lei Federal 8.234/1991* (Federal Law No. 8,234/1991).²¹ This legislation defined *Educação Nutricional* as an exclusive professional practice of nutritionists.

At the same time, the process known as the nutrition transition, characterized by the reduction in morbidity and mortality from acute conditions and the increasing prevalence of obesity and other chronic diseases, led to greater recognition of the role of nutrition professionals in public health. Scholars such as Monteiro, Lunas, and Torres²² emphasized the importance of integrating food and nutrition with educational strategies as a decisive approach for the effective management of these highly prevalent health conditions.

However, the integration of food and education during this period remained largely focused on physiological and nutritional characteristics. Combined with a political context that minimized the social

dimensions of food, this approach reinforced a primarily technical and rationalized perspective on dietary practices, which helps explain the predominance of the concept of *Educação Nutricional* (Nutrition Education) at the time.

Health Promotion and Food and Nutrition Education Finally Converge

It is essential to highlight Health Promotion as a key ally of FNE. The World Health Organization (WHO) defined Health Promotion in the Ottawa Charter as “the process of enabling communities to increase control over and improve their quality of life and health, including greater participation in controlling this process.”²³ This and other outcomes of the International Conferences on Health Promotion^{24,25} influenced the articulation between *Promoção da Alimentação Saudável* – PAS (Promotion of Healthy Eating), a concept closely linked to Health Promotion, and FNE. As a result, PAS became a central strategy for guiding health promotion initiatives in Brazil.

The promotion of healthy eating gradually became an important subject of reflection within the field of nutrition. When examining the meanings attributed to healthy eating promotion during the 1980s and 1990s in Brazil, it is possible to infer that the field of Nutrition began to move closer to the Human and Social Sciences, particularly because the biological sciences had previously dominated scientific approaches in this area.^{1,26}

The *I Conferência Nacional de Segurança Alimentar* (First National Conference on Food Security), a space for social participation and oversight held in 1994, included Nutrition Education in the final section of its report, proposing a single action: “9.4. Encourage educational initiatives in the field of food and nutrition at the community level.”²⁷

At the federal level, the *Ministério da Saúde* – MS (Ministry of Health) formulated and published, in 1999, the *Política Nacional de Alimentação e Nutrição* – PNAN (National Food and Nutrition Policy). In Guideline IV – Promotion of Healthy Eating Practices and Lifestyles, the document already employed the term “*Food and Nutrition Education*”, while acknowledging that it “contains complex and even conflicting elements. Therefore, consensus should be sought regarding the content, methods, and techniques of the educational process, considering the diversity of geographic, economic, and cultural contexts.”²⁸

During the 2000s, academic debates and publications began to expand the conceptual understanding of FNE. One important influence was the establishment of the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais do Curso de Graduação em Nutrição* (National Curriculum Guidelines for Undergraduate Nutrition Programs) through Ordinance CNE/CES n. 5/2001, which identified Nutrition Education as a key competency to be developed during the professional training of nutritionists.²⁹ In the same period, the project for *Programa Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger Program) was conceived and later implemented in 2003 with the objective of combating hunger and poverty by ensuring access to adequate food for the Brazilian population.³⁰

These developments allowed both the academic field and public policy arenas to revisit discussions on educational actions related to food and nutrition. In the case of the *Programa Fome Zero*, the term “*food education*” was used. Following the publication of the PNAN (1999), however, the expression “*Food and Nutrition Education*” gradually became consolidated. It took several decades for the notions of food and nutrition to be fully reintegrated within the same conceptual framework of educational actions in this field.¹

The *II Conferência Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional* – SAN (Second National Conference on Food and Nutrition Security) presented a different configuration compared with the first conference. Nutrition Education was included within Priority Action Axis 4 – Health and Nutrition Actions, with a specific

subsection dedicated to Nutrition Education in the context of school feeding.³¹ It is important to note that, at that time, the broader concept of FNE had not yet been fully incorporated into policy discussions, and the term “*Nutrition Education*” continued to be used. It was also from the report of this conference that the expression “*healthy eating*” became institutionalized in Brazil.³²

In 2005, Resolution 380/2005 of the *Conselho Federal de Nutricionistas* – CFN (Federal Council of Nutritionists) defined the professional areas of practice and responsibilities of nutritionists.³³ In this document, Food and Nutrition Education was defined as:

A procedure carried out by the nutritionist with individuals or population groups, considering the interactions and meanings that compose the phenomenon of eating behavior, in order to advise the necessary changes for the readjustment of dietary habits.

Beyond defining the concept of FNE, the resolution also restricted its practice exclusively to nutritionists. This decision had implications for subsequent actions, programs, and policies, limiting the scope and reach of educational interventions related to food and nutrition.

The year 2006 marked a particularly significant moment for FNE. One important milestone was the publication of the first edition of the *Guia Alimentar para a População Brasileira* – GAPB (Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population). Recognized as a key national guideline, the document established dietary recommendations aimed at promoting healthier eating patterns among Brazilians.¹¹ Although aligned with the PNAN and other policy documents of the time, the guide still used the term “*Nutrition Education*”.

The document refers to Nutrition Education in two main contexts. First, when discussing the PNAN guidelines related to School Health, it emphasizes Nutrition Education and the promotion of healthy eating as essential components of the school environment for fostering healthy eating habits. Second, in Guideline 1 – Healthy Foods and Meals, it proposes that the government and the food production sector develop continuous initiatives for nutritional guidance and education, while respecting the cultural identities of different populations.³⁴

Also in 2006, the *Sistema Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional* – SISAN (National System for Food and Nutrition Security) was established through Law 11,346/2006, known as the *Lei Orgânica de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional* – LOSAN (Organic Law on Food and Nutrition Security). Its objective was to ensure the *Direito Humano à Alimentação Adequada* – DHAA (Human Right to Adequate Food). Although FNE was not explicitly mentioned in the document, its relevance appears implicitly through references to “the promotion of health, nutrition, and food among the population, including specific population groups and those in situations of social vulnerability.”³⁵

In the same year, the *I Fórum de Educação Alimentar e Nutricional para a Promoção da Saúde e do DHAA* (First Forum on Food and Nutrition Education for Health Promotion and the Human Right to Adequate Food) was held. The event sought to discuss FNE as “a fundamental process and tool for Health Promotion.”¹¹

Within the sphere of public policy, 2006 was also notable due to the publication of the *Política Nacional de Promoção da Saúde* – PNPS (National Health Promotion Policy) through Portaria MS/GM nº 687/2006.³⁶ The policy aimed to:

[...] promote quality of life and reduce vulnerability and health risks related to their determinants and conditioning factors - ways of living, working conditions, housing, environment, education, leisure, culture, and access to essential goods and services.

Within this framework, healthy eating was identified as one of the key strategies for implementing health promotion policies.

Furthermore, the PNPS incorporated the Interministerial Ordinance No. 1,010/2006, which established national guidelines for promoting healthy eating in early childhood, primary, and secondary education institutions in both public and private school systems. One of its priority axes was: I – Food and Nutrition Education actions, considering eating habits as expressions of regional and national cultural manifestations.³⁷

Advances in public policies related to food and nutrition continued in the following years. Beyond the health sector, collaboration between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education led to the establishment of Decree No. 6286/2007, known as the Health at School Program (Programa Saúde na Escola). Its objective was “to contribute to the comprehensive education of students in the public basic education system through actions of prevention, health promotion, and health care.” Within the program, Action III – Promotion of Healthy Eating reflects the context of FNE, bringing the education sector closer to primary health care.³⁸

In 2008, the Second Forum on Food and Nutrition Education for Health Promotion and the DHAA was held. Unlike the first event, its objective was:¹

To discuss current health education practices and the use of food and nutrition education methods and techniques as strategies for promoting healthy eating, health, and the development of citizenship, contributing to the empowerment of individuals in caring for their own health.

The following year, another important event took place: the First Forum on the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of Food and Nutrition Education. Beyond addressing the topics discussed in the previous forum, its objective was to disseminate experiences from FNE projects developed across different sectors. It also sought to strengthen and expand discussions and analyses related to FNE in different contexts, with a focus on improving the activities of the *Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar*–PNAE (National School Feeding Program).¹¹

These forums contributed to the further conceptual development of FNE, progressively incorporating principles of Health Promotion, particularly through the promotion of healthy eating practices.¹¹

Within this context, Law No. 11,947/2009 was enacted, regulating school feeding within the framework of the *Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar* – PNAE (National School Feeding Program). The law highlights FNE in three specific ways: first, through its incorporation into the teaching and learning process by integrating food and nutrition topics into the school curriculum in order to promote healthy eating practices; second, by recognizing its role within the objectives of PNAE, which include supporting students’ growth, development, and learning while fostering healthy eating habits; and third, by assigning responsibility to states, the Federal District, and municipalities to promote FNE initiatives.³⁹

Continuing the advancement of public policies in this field, Decree No. 7,272/2010 is also noteworthy. This decree regulated the *Lei Orgânica de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional* – LOSAN (Organic Law on Food and Nutrition Security) and established the *Política Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional* – PNSAN (National Food and Nutrition Security Policy). Unlike LOSAN, the decree explicitly incorporated FNE in

Guideline III, which provides for “the establishment of permanent processes of food and nutrition education, research, and training in the fields of food and nutrition security and the Human Right to Adequate Food.”⁴⁰

In 2011, an updated version of the PNAN was published, giving greater prominence to FNE within two of its guidelines. Guideline II –Promotion of Adequate and Healthy Eating defines FNE as “a process of dialogue between health professionals and the population, of fundamental importance for the exercise of autonomy and self-care,” emphasizing its priority within both intra- and intersectoral planning agendas. In addition, Guideline IX –Cooperation and Coordination for Food and Nutrition Security identifies articulation with educational and social assistance networks as a strategy for promoting FNE.⁴¹

The current conceptual understanding of FNE was ultimately consolidated with the publication of the *Marco de Referência de Educação Alimentar e Nutricional para as Políticas Públicas* – MREAN (Reference Framework for Food and Nutrition Education for Public Policies), an intersectoral and interministerial document that has become the primary national reference for FNE.⁴² The framework establishes principles and guidelines for operationalizing FNE across different public policy contexts. Its development was the result of decades of political debate and conceptual disputes before reaching a broader and more comprehensive definition:

Food and Nutrition Education, in the context of ensuring the Human Right to Adequate Food and guaranteeing Food and Nutrition Security, is a field of knowledge and a continuous and permanent practice that is transdisciplinary, intersectoral, and multiprofessional, aimed at promoting the autonomous and voluntary adoption of healthy eating habits. FNE practices should employ problem-posing and active educational approaches and resources that encourage dialogue with individuals and population groups, considering all stages of the life course, the different stages of the food system, and the interactions and meanings that shape eating behavior.

Since the publication of the MREAN, this concept of FNE has guided strategies, actions, planning processes, and practices related to the Promotion of Adequate and Healthy Eating within the scope of public policies.

Contemporary Developments Following the Reference Framework for Food and Nutrition Education in Public Policies

A significant milestone in this period was the publication of the 2nd edition of the *Guia Alimentar para a População Brasileira* – GAPB (Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population) in 2014, a national guideline that provides orientation for the food and nutrition practices of the Brazilian population. The new edition of the guide was developed based on the principles of the Reference Framework for Food and Nutrition Education in Public Policies (MREAN), expanding the understanding of food beyond its strictly biological and nutritional aspects through the adoption of the NOVA food classification, which emphasizes the degree of food processing and food systems rather than focusing solely on the nutrients present in each food group when planning FNE actions.⁴³

In the same year, the Intersectoral Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Obesity was also launched.⁴⁴ The document reflects the application of the FNE concept aligned with MREAN, emphasizing that

actions should be implemented through intersectoral collaboration, particularly involving the education and labor sectors. In addition, the PNAE is cited as an important strategy for implementing FNE actions.

Also in 2014, the updated version of the PNPS reinforced the relevance of health promotion within the *Sistema Único de Saúde* (Unified Health System - SUS). The policy highlighted five priority areas, including adequate and healthy eating, thereby strengthening the role of FNE within the Promotion of Adequate and Healthy Eating (PAAS).⁴⁵

The growing emphasis on PAAS in programs, policies, and publications led the *Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação* (National Fund for the Development of Education - FNDE) to launch, in 2017, the *I Jornada de Educação Alimentar e Nutricional* (First Food and Nutrition Education Conference- EAN). The initiative aimed to promote students' autonomy in making healthier food choices by recognizing schools as environments that foster adequate and healthy eating. It also sought to integrate knowledge related to food and nutrition into the curricular content of different educational levels.⁴⁶

Throughout its historical trajectory, FNE has assumed different meanings depending on the prevailing political and institutional contexts. The concept evolved from food education, to nutrition education, and ultimately to the broader framework of Nutrition Education. Over time, FNE from being viewed as a restricted professional practice to being recognized as a transdisciplinary, intersectoral, and multiprofessional field of knowledge and practice.⁴²

Consequently, public policies and legal documents have also adapted to the prevailing concepts of each historical period. In this chronological progression, the Federal Council of Nutritionists (Conselho Federal de Nutricionistas - CFN) incorporated the MREAN concept of FNE through Resolution No. 600/2018.⁴⁷ This change effectively altered the interpretation of Federal Law No. 8234 (September 17, 1991), which had previously defined FNE as an exclusive professional practice of nutritionists. Despite this advancement toward a broader understanding of FNE, it is noteworthy that the term "*Nutrition Education*" still appears in the same resolution. This conceptual inconsistency indicates that the process of consolidating the new framework was still ongoing.

The year 2018 was a year marked by numerous publications related to FNE. Among them, the book *Food and Nutrition Education: Articulation of Knowledge* stands out as a significant contribution proposing dialogue between the fields of education and nutrition. The publication resulted from a research project conducted by *Universidade Federal do Ceará* (Federal University of Ceará - UFC) in partnership with the FNDE, with the aim of contributing to school feeding practices in Brazil.⁴⁸

In parallel with this publication, and still within the context of school feeding, Law No. 13666/2018 amended the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* – Lei 9.394/1996 - LDB (Law of National Education Guidelines and Frameworks) to include Food and Nutrition Education as a cross-cutting theme within the national school curriculum.⁴⁹ This initiative aligns with the objectives of the FNDE, particularly following the launch of the First FNE Conference the previous year. The legislation aimed to incorporate themes related to PAAS into the educational structure, thereby promoting student health and well-being.

The law established that FNE should be addressed as a transversal theme across the entire school curriculum, as recommended by the LDB.⁴⁹ Consequently, educational institutions were given a period to adapt to the new guidelines and integrate FNE into their curricular programs.

Within the sphere of public policy, the PNPS underwent another update in 2018. Although the revised version maintained the same principles and guidelines introduced in the 2014 edition, it incorporated, within the field of food and nutrition, the recommendations of the GAPB⁴³ regarding the classification of foods

according to their degree of processing and the relationship between food practices and social and environmental factors.⁵⁰

At the federal level, another important publication was *Princípios e Práticas para Educação Alimentar e Nutricional* (Principles and Practices for Food and Nutrition Education), produced through a partnership between the CFN, the *Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social* (Ministry of Social Development - MDS), and the *Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto* (Federal University of Ouro Preto - UFOP). This material aimed to encourage and engage managers and professionals from different sectors in actions related to the DHAA, through the implementation of FNE initiatives.⁵¹ The document presented the nine guiding principles of MREAN for FNE practices, offering examples of actions while considering the biological, social, cultural, and political dimensions that shape adequate and healthy eating.⁵¹

Although the scope of this study focuses on Brazil, a broader global perspective becomes necessary at this point in the narrative due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was officially declared by the WHO in March 2020.⁵² The pandemic significantly affected numerous sectors, including FNE activities. During this period, Brazil experienced a sharp increase in food and nutrition insecurity.⁵³ In response, official institutions and higher education institutions took the lead in producing and disseminating FNE educational materials.

Marra et al.⁵⁴ observed that these materials were widely produced, particularly in digital formats, and could be categorized into four thematic areas: I - food hygiene and handling; II - specific pathologies relevant to food and nutrition; III - food insecurity, breastfeeding, and pregnancy, and IV - FNE and guidance for nutrition professionals.

From 2022 onward, strategies to strengthen PAAS through FNE were resumed with greater intensity at the national level. A notable example is the technical document *Educação Alimentar e Nutricional no PNAE: atores sociais e possibilidades de atuação* (Food and Nutrition Education in the PNAE: Social Actors and Possibilities for Action)⁵⁵, released by FNDE. The document aimed to encourage the implementation of FNE in public schools across the country by clarifying the roles of social actors involved in FNE and outlining their potential areas of action.

Based on the MREAN, the technical document also presented examples of FNE initiatives implemented in different school contexts, and provides guidance for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of such actions. The document aimed to contribute to the promotion, protection, and support of adequate and healthy eating practices within the school environment, taking into account cultural, regional, and local specificities.⁵⁵

Another initiative aimed at expanding the reach of school feeding programs, this time through audiovisual media, was the reality television program "*Merendeiras do Brasil*" ("School Cooks of Brazil"). The program aimed to highlight the work of school cooks and the quality of school feeding in the country. The program was launched in March 2022 by the *Ministério da Educação* (Ministry of Education - MEC) and FNDE, in partnership with the *Universidade de Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira* (University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony - UNILAB). The program sought to highlight the work of school cooks and the importance of school meals in supporting student learning, promoting health, strengthening citizenship, and encouraging sustainability.⁵⁶

Beyond the school feeding context, 2022 also saw the launch of the Innovation Laboratory in Food and Nutrition Education (LIS-EAN), a project developed by PAHO Brazil in partnership with the *Universidade de Brasília* (University of Brasília - UnB). The initiative aimed to identify, systematize, and disseminate FNE experiences while fostering dialogue about challenges and advances achieved over the previous decade in light of the MREAN.⁵⁷ The initiatives documented by the laboratory were organized into four thematic areas: I

- FNE in the Health Sector; II - FNE in the Education Sector; III - FNE in the Social Assistance Sector, and IV - FNE in Other Fields of Practice.

Although LIS-EAN was conceived and launched in 2022, its main publication - *Innovation Laboratory in Food and Nutrition Education: Celebrating 10 Years of the Reference Framework for Food and Nutrition Education in Public Policies* - was released in 2023. The publication emphasized the crucial role of LIS-EAN in promoting and documenting FNE initiatives, particularly within the educational sector, highlighting activities such as the FNE Conferences and professional training in Nutrition.⁵⁸

The experiences documented by LIS-EAN, especially those focused on the early steps of implementing the Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population, stimulated reflections on expanding the application of the other steps proposed by the guidelines. The laboratory emphasized the importance of continued and transdisciplinary investment in FNE actions, integrating them into the routine of public initiatives across multiple sectors. In addition to celebrating the 10th anniversary of MREAN, LIS-EAN aimed to contribute to contemporary reflections and stimulate future developments related to the framework.⁵⁸ In this sense, all the publications and discussions that have emerged since the publication of MREAN have contributed to shaping and refining the understanding of Food and Nutrition Education as a field of knowledge, consolidating the theoretical and methodological foundations that guide current practices.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Understanding the historical development of the concept of Food and Nutrition Education (FNE) through political, social, economic, and territorial perspectives reveals particularly dynamic trajectory over the past century. At different moments, FNE was primarily oriented toward food security, at other times confined to the uniprofessional domain of nutrition, and later expanded into a more complex and intersectoral concept. What remains evident, however, is that FNE has consistently been present throughout Brazil's national history during this period.

Beyond recounting historical trajectory, the present essay also offers reflections on the broader contexts that shaped these developments over time. These include the predominance of medical perspectives in the early stages of food and nutrition science; the influence of capitalist and productivity-oriented logics on food systems; the historical marginalization of the relationship between food and the human sciences; and the role of the education sector, which, although consistently involved in FNE initiatives, has often remained somewhat peripheral. This relative distance may be attributed either to the lack of a clearly defined theoretical and methodological framework or to the ongoing development of intersectoral and interprofessional approaches in the field.

As a limitation of this essay, it is important to acknowledge the absence of a more detailed discussion regarding the role of the Sistema Único de Saúde (Unified Health System - SUS) in this historical trajectory, as well as the lack of engagement with contemporary discussions on intersectionality and its implications for FNE. These topics represent important avenues for future research and merit deeper exploration in studies dedicated to examining FNE as a social phenomenon and its relationship with human communities and territories..

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Contributors

Hirata MY was responsible for the conception and design of the study, structuring and drafting of the manuscript, qualitative data analysis and interpretation, as well as review and critical evaluation. Rodrigues LS contributed to the structuring of the manuscript, review, critical evaluation, and approval of the final version. Cabrini D contributed to the conception of the study and coordination of the subsequent stages, assisted in the drafting of the article, and carried out the review, critical evaluation, and approval of the final version.

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