

Narratives on school feeding in Medellín, Colombia: rights, policies, and pedagogical actions

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Abstract

In the field of education, school feeding (SF) still lacks more in-depth studies. In this paper¹, we aim to understand the narratives of different actors on school feeding in Medellín, as a right, policy, and pedagogical action. This is a qualitative study based on the (auto)biographical approach (Delory-Momberger, 2014) in three educational institutions in Medellín, Colombia, with 13 social actors – those in charge of the School Feeding Program (PAE), teachers, and 5th grade elementary school students. According to the collaborators' narratives, in the field of law, school feeding not only supplements nutrition but also keep students in school. As a policy, the narratives pointed to universalising the School Meals Programme (PAE) in Colombia, equitably across all educational institutions. As a pedagogical action, it promotes food education, aids in the socialisation of eating, reveals cultural identities and, finally, encourages mutual respect and citizenship.

Keywords: School feeding. Policies-rights-educational actions. (Auto)biographical narratives. Medellín, Colombia.

Narrativas sobre a alimentação escolar de Medellín, Colômbia: direitos, políticas e ações pedagógicas

Resumo

No campo da Educação, a Alimentação Escolar (AE) ainda carece de estudos mais aprofundados. Nesta escrita, objetivamos compreender as narrativas de diferentes atores sobre a AE em Medellín, como direito, política e ação

pedagógica. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa, ancorada na abordagem (auto)biográfica (Delory-Momberger, 2014) em três instituições educativas de Medellín-Colômbia, com 13 atores sociais – encarregados do Programa de Alimentação Escolar (PAE), docentes e estudantes do 5º ano do ensino primário. Segundo as narrativas dos colaboradores, no campo do Direito, a AE, além de suplementar a nutrição, mantém o estudante na escola. Como política, as narrativas apontaram para universalizar o PAE na Colômbia, equitativamente a todas as instituições educativas. Como ação pedagógica, promove a educação alimentar, auxilia as sociabilidades do comer, desvela as identidades culturais e, por fim, estimula o respeito mútuo e a cidadania.

Palavras-chave: Alimentação escolar. Políticas-direitos-ações pedagógicas. Narrativas (auto)biográficas. Medellín, Colômbia.

Narrativas sobre la alimentación escolar en Medellín, Colombia: derechos, políticas y acciones pedagógicas

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Resumen

En el campo de la educación, la alimentación escolar (AE) aún requiere estudios más profundos. En este artículo, nuestro objetivo es comprender las narrativas de diferentes actores sobre la alimentación escolar en Medellín, como derecho, política y acción pedagógica. Se trata de una investigación cualitativa, basado en el enfoque (auto)biográfico (Delory-Momberger, 2014) en tres instituciones educativas de Medellín (Colombia), con 13 actores sociales – responsables del Programa de Alimentación Escolar (PAE), docentes y estudiantes de 5.º curso de primaria. Según los relatos de los colaboradores, en el ámbito del derecho, la alimentación escolar, además de complementar la nutrición, mantiene al estudiante en la escuela. Como política, las narrativas apuntaron a universalizar el Programa de Alimentación Escolar (PAE) en Colombia, de manera equitativa para todas las instituciones educativas. Como acción pedagógica, promueve la educación alimentaria, favorece la sociabilidad en torno a la comida, revela las identidades culturales y, por último, fomenta el respeto mutuo y la ciudadanía.

Palabras clave: Alimentación escolar. Políticas-derechos-acciones pedagógicas. Narrativas (auto)biográficas. Medellín, Colombia.

Introduction

School Feeding (SF) is understood as a set of actions, practices and policies that seek to ensure at least a nutritious and adequate meal for students duly enrolled in public schools. Since the end of World War II, food at school has existed in many countries, but only with the Rome Declaration on World Food Security of 1996, it becomes a right called Food and Nutrition Security (FNS), established by the United Nations (UN).

The World Food Programme (WFP), established by the UN, with operations in 120 countries, is considered the largest humanitarian body in the world, whose objective is to combat hunger and promote food security. Among these countries, there is Colombia, which occupied, in 2025, the second place in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the seventh in the world, in terms of income inequality. According to the WFP, one in four Colombians experiences food insecurity in the country.

To ensure continued access to nutritious, balanced, and varied food for the most vulnerable people – children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, ethnic groups, victims of violence, confined and displaced communities, small farmers, migrants, and host communities – the WFP conducts cash transfers and purchases of food products for the Colombian government.

The School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) is the most prominent strategy since its creation in 1955. This is a State policy that aims to distribute a food supplementation, during the school period, to children and adolescents enrolled in the Integrated School Enrollment System (SIMAT, original acronym) of public schools in Colombia (Colombia, 2022).

School Feeding (SF) is widely debated in the field of nutrition. However, the dialogue about SF in Education is still very limited. We made a comparative study of the theme between the areas of nutrition and education in the database of the Scientific Electronic Library Online (Scielo), with the descriptor “school feeding” and we used Brazilian and international journals only in nutrition, without establishing a temporal unit. In this first research, we found 118 articles and, when using duplicates and studies not developed in school institutions as exclusion criteria, we obtained 71 studies that addressed nutrition in schools. In new research, in this same database and methodology

established with the selection of national and international journals restricted to Education, 18 studies emerged. From the same exclusion criterion, only ten articles investigated School Feeding (SF). This data demonstrates the relevance of our research.

That said, we present the following guiding question: what meanings do the social actors of three educational institutions in Medellín, Colombia, narrate about SF? To answer it, we aimed to understand the narratives built by these social actors about SF within these three educational institutions.

The organization of this text follows this configuration of sections: "Introduction;" "Methodological paths of research;" "Food practice of humanity: a historical synthesis;" "Medellín: stories, cultural and gastronomic experiences;" "School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) in Medellín: a critical analysis;" "Narratives of different actors on School Feeding (SF) as law, politics, and pedagogical action;" and "Final considerations."

Methodological paths of the research

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This is a qualitative research within the educational context in three educational institutions in Medellín focusing on (auto)biographical narratives of different social actors about School Feeding (SF).

By adopting the perspective of (auto)biographical narratives as a theoretical-methodological aspect of this writing, we make an epistemopolitical choice because we understand that the collaborators did not play the role of mere narrators, but rather of co-authors of this investigative process.

We captured the idea of Souza (2014, p. 40) by highlighting the narratives as promoters of "[...] reflections on life, formation, individual and collective trajectories, as well as on respect for freedom, autonomy and individual and social democracy". In this sense, we believe that "[...] the narrative of the other is thus one of the places where we experience our own biographical construction; where it can move, reconfigure, expand its horizon [...]" (Delory-Momberger, 2014, p. 61).

The analysis of the narratives is based on the interpretative-comprehensive perspective in three stages – I. pre-analysis/cross-reading; II. thematic

reading; and III. interpretative-comprehensive reading of the *corpus* –, according to Souza's (2014) perspective and, from it, we seek to highlight the relevance of the experiences through a sensitive listening of the said and the unsaid by the collaborating individuals about the SF.

The adopted devices were non-participant observation and narrative interviews with three teachers, seven students of the 5th grade of elementary education and three teachers in charge of the School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) in the institutions participating in the study.

The approach to the field took place through a meeting with school deans from three educational institutions in Medellín to present our theme and study proposal. All deans agreed to integrate our research, which was even approved by the Ethics and Research Committee of the State University of Bahia (UNEB, acronym in Portuguese) (Opinion No. 6,828,298, on May 16, 2024).

For non-participant observation, we used the field diary to note the daily distribution of meals in all visits carried out in the three educational institutions (two visits per school), accounting for a total of six visits.

In summary, School 1 – which is close to the Robledo neighborhood – is a large, newly renovated institution with good structure. The school is contemplated with two strategies of the School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) (Prepared Food and Milk Glass). It has new utensils – pots, plates, mugs, and spoons –, equipment – tables, stove, refrigerator, and freezer – in excellent conditions, a clean kitchen of medium size and a relatively large cafeteria, which serves, in a comfortable way, the students contemplated by the PAE. This educational institution has an adequate structure, from the preparation and hygiene of food to the conservation and cleaning of utensils.

School 2 – in the Manrique neighborhood – is medium-sized and of good to regular installation, as there are small damages, but they do not compromise the structure of the building. We observed the existence of two strategies – Prepared Food and Industrialized Food. As for the structure of the refectory, we realized the need for expansion to meet the demands. There are new and well-maintained utensils – pots, plates, mugs, and spoons –, the equipment – stove, refrigerator, and freezer – are preserved, the kitchen and the refectory are clean. However, due to its small size, it does not accommodate

the employees, nor the students enrolled in the School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym). In addition, there is a lack of tables and chairs for students to settle in better.

School 3 – in the Moravia neighborhood – is of medium size, its foundations are safe, but it needs renovation and expansion. During the visits, we detected only one strategy of the PAE – Industrialized Feed –, as the kitchen was deactivated by the municipal government and there is no refectory, furniture and utensils for better distribution and consumption of food. Despite all the care with the hygiene of the meal, there is a lack of care related to the dignity of the students. We were struck by the scene of a student running his fingers through the glass of his yogurt, which compromises public health requirements. In this regard, Santos, Soares e Silva (2024, p. 4) reveal that assistance is associated with “[...] state obligation to provide rights, through public policies that ensure human dignity”.

It should be noted that, in all three schools, the lunch ladies were properly uniformed – white blouse and pants, in addition to white rubber boots – with a hat, mask and disposable gloves and those who handled the food wore white aprons.

For the narrative interviews, we presented the consent form to all collaborators and forwarded the document to the guardians of underage students. For its realization, we had the themes of each group of collaborators exposed on the table of a room that was made available to us and we used the recorder as a support for capturing this data. Next, the interviews were transcribed, sent to the review of the collaborators, translated to Portuguese, and used fictitious names chosen by the participants of this study.

In our study, three categories of analysis emerged – School Feeding (SF) as law, as politics and as pedagogical action – contemplated in the title section “Narratives of different actors on School Feeding (SF) as law, politics and pedagogical action.”

Food practice of humanity: a historical synthesis

[...] we become what we eat (Fischler, 2001, p. 66).

Feeding is part of the routine of any living being and eating is not exclusively related to biological needs. According to the above epigraph, food practice establishes a link with culture, education, and changes in the behaviors of human beings in their civilizing processes. So, the human relationship with food is not a simple dynamic of life (Santos, 2008).

Food carries its intimate nature, by crossing the oral obstacle, penetrating our organism, and settling inside us. That is, food and its lack promote the transmutation of our bodies or even metamorphoses our essences (Fischler, 2001).

Although briefly, it is essential to go through the historical movement of food on our planet, since food has meanings that affect its daily consumption, which is crossed by the areas of Health, Politics, Culture, Education and Law, among other fields of knowledge.

Vinha (2017) points out that food has several meanings, namely:

[...] often understood as an aggregating or transgressing element, sometimes sacred, accompanied by rituals; other times trivialized, capitalized, transformed into a simple commodity. We understand that food can propagate brands, process customs, establish bonds and create consumers by determining classes, tribes, establishing fashion, excluding, or including people (Vinha, 2017, p. 278).

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We agree with the author in linking the symbolic approach, arising from the relationships between people and human works aimed at production, sharing and consumption. It is, therefore, a matter of social practices marked by the cultural constructions of what can and cannot be eaten.

Food and eating provide people with multiple visualizations: the body and biological needs; health and physical well-being; and, above all, all the representations that make up sociabilities in the context of human life over time.

According to Flandrin and Montanari (1998), there is no accuracy as to the origin of the use of food in the human meal. But it can be assured that the human being has always been omnivorous. That is, their diet was based on menus that mixed meat and plant-based ingredients initially consumed *in natura*, which were introduced with the development of agriculture.

In Prehistory, the human being fed mainly on meat (remains of dead animals or hunts carried out). From the Neolithic period, with the discovery of fire and the expansion of agriculture, the production of cereals, especially wheat and rye, began to incorporate human food. In this sense, the handling of food using fire has diversified people's food menu.

In the Ancient Age, there was a lot of variety of foods: fruits, cereals, breads, cookies, meats – red or white –, some types of alcoholic beverages (especially wine), milk, honey, olive oil and water. In Mesopotamia, the sharing of meals was quite representative of religious or royal banquets (Joannès, 1998). In Egypt, hygiene and the amount of food were relevant to the longevity of the human being (Bresciani, 1998). Greek food practice was based on arboriculture – fruits, legumes, and vegetables – and on honey, wine, olive oil, breads, and proteins were concentrated in the meat of fish and crustaceans (Amourel'li, 1998). Roman food was agricultural-based and meat was avoided because they were considered ingredients of barbarian peoples (Dupont, 1998).

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During the Middle Ages, human food had its variety expanded with the significant presence of animal products in the meals of the popular classes. According to Montanari (1998, p. 216), "[...] during the high Middle Ages, European peasants had a more balanced diet than in other times". For the author, the quality of life of a person ceases to be the biological identity to be supported by sociocultural practices such as the realization of collective meals in the form of banquets. According to Montanari (1998), meals were very nutritious due to the variety of the menu, however, the aristocratic policies imposed caused consequences to the food of the population, reducing the consumption of foods such as meat, wine, breads, eggs, and cheeses at the popular table.

The planet's first demographic explosion occurred in the 18th century. Policies that did not favor low-income populations significantly reduced the quality of food in time, especially during the two world wars, which exacerbated the worsening hunger of thousands of people.

From the industrial expansion in the Contemporary Age, the nutritional and food quality decline was evident, as many of the foods consumed were prepared with excessive addition of sugar and salt. During the socioeconomic crisis, the poor population opted for the consumption of less nutritious foods.

However, the access facilitated by more agile transport – airplanes and ships – to food products and the use of technologies in the agricultural sector made it possible to grow and harvest food at any time of the season (Péhaut, 1998).

From the perspective of Morineau (1998), we find a lot of obscurity in the context of the history of food, it is deeply difficult to build an evolutionary scenario over the centuries. Despite our attempt to expose a chronological panorama of food, we are aware that such an effort still has gaps.

Medellín: stories, cultural and gastronomic experiences

Founded on November 2, 1675 and located in the Aburrá Valley, in the central-western region of the Andes Mountains of South America, Medellín, the current capital of the state of Antioquia, Colombia, emerged in the 17th century after arousing the interest of Spanish settlers, due to the abundant waters and due to the objects of jewellery found in the mountains, mainly of the Quimbaya culture.

From the 19th century, the economy of Medellín ceased to be agricultural and the city assumed itself as the main commercial center of Antioquia. The rapid expansion of the city has brought many benefits to its population, but also negative consequences, with a high crime rate (Ruiz-Vásquez and others, 2023).

According to Lopes (2022), there are three major phases of violence in Medellín, namely:

1. *expansion of the city and lack of territorial control* (1965 to 1981): as a result of the great urban growth of Medellín, the population migrated to the periphery and, in these areas, security, education and health care services were not guaranteed, which led to the emergence of several conflicts and enticements of young people to the illegal drug market, increasing the rates of violence in the city with high homicide rates;
2. *apogee of violence in Medellín* (1982 to 1994): the socioeconomic crisis in Medellín and the “promising” and lucrative drug trade caused violence to explode with new armed groups of different political ideologies that were confronting each other. In this scenario, we find the leadership of Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria in a strong criminal organization scheme, recognized as a powerful cartel boss in the world. By being evaluated

as the most violent city in the world in 1991, the Colombian government allied itself with the United States federal drug repression agency, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the Cali cartel to fight the Medellín cartel, achieving a brief period of peace with the death of Pablo Escobar in 1993;

3. guerrillas – *from rural to urban* (1995 to 2005): paramilitary groups realized that their activities in the rural areas of Antioquia were not effective and, to maintain their business, they migrated to the urban area of the cities of Antioquia and, once again, Medellín resurfaces as the strategic place of guerrilla groups, mainly in five regions: Commune 6 – *Doce de Octubre*; Commune 7 – *Robledo*; Commune 8 – *Villa Hermosa*; Commune 9 – *Buenos Aires* and Commune 13 – *San Javier* (Giraldo-Ramírez, 2008).

From 2002, the right-wing president Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010) organized a military offensive that left a bloody balance of dead and wounded, as well as dozens of people missing, especially in Commune 13. The operation had the support of paramilitary groups, active in the neighborhoods and only at the present time has the true dimension of the massacre been revealed. Parallel to this action by the central government, local government authorities made use of an ambitious investment plan in infrastructure and social inclusion programs under the motto “From fear to hope,” mobilizing efforts to promote peace in the city.

“*Paisas*” are people who live in the Paisa region (territory that includes the departments of Antioquia, Caldas, Quindio and Risaralda and the north of the Cauca Valley and northwest of Tolima, Colombia). The expression “*paisa*” means “fellow countryman, compatriot” and expresses a cultural identity of a people with a strong regionalist sentiment. Medellínans honor their word, they like to narrate the stories of their ancestors and the great transformation that figures today in Medellín.

The culture in Medellín is a mixture of the influences of the original Andean peoples with those of the Spanish colonizers. Care for nature – plants and animals –, environmental sustainability and urban afforestation processes are cultural habits. In addition to the paintings of images and graffiti on the public and private walls scattered through the streets of the city, there are also the famous bronze sculptures by Fernando Botero, located around the Museum

of Antioquia. The songs and dances of the Medellinans are based on the rhythms of salsa, cumbia and reggaeton for the young.

There is intense sports practice, encouraged and administered by the Institute of Sports and Recreation (Inder, original acronym), which offers simple gymnastics equipment, multi-sport courts, public swimming pools – by communes – and football fields scattered throughout the neighborhoods.

The tightening of food ties with culture makes the gastronomy of *paisas* very peculiar, from its preparation, to the ways of eating and how they share food, it is worth mentioning here the *paisa* tray, the arepa, the pork crackling with guacamole. There are several drinks, among the non-alcoholic ones, the juices made with water or milk or lemon or cherry or soursop stand out. Among the alcoholic beverages, we find rum (a distillate made from sugarcane molasses aged in an oak barrel).

School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) in Medellín: a critical analysis

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The PAE is a State policy for School Feeding (SF) in Colombia that seeks to ensure student permanence in school, through the distribution of food supplementation, with the presence of macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins, and fats) and micronutrients (zinc, iron, vitamin A, and calcium) in the “*minutas*” – menus planned by nutritionists who aim to balance the food offered in schools.

Although an important measure, the PAE is not universalized in public educational institutions in Colombia according to the following approach published by the Ministry of National Education:

Boys, girls, and adolescents from rural and urban areas, from different ethnic groups, registered in the Enrollment System (SIMAT, original acronym) as official students, and funded with resources from the General Participation System (Colombia, [20-?b], p. 4).

The priority criteria adopted by the PAE, in urban or rural areas, relate to the vulnerabilities of the population in ethnic communities – indigenous, Afro-Colombians, *raizales*², gypsies –, the population victim of armed conflict

and the population with nutritional deficits and low socioeconomic conditions established by the System for Identification of Potential Beneficiaries of Social Programs (Sisbén, original acronym).

The PAE is planned to serve schools according to: a) geographic location (educational institutions in the rural area, with priority to those with only one teacher; educational institutions that exclusively serve ethnic communities – indigenous, Afro-Colombian, *raizales*, gypsies); and b) urban educational institutions with a high number of populations of low socioeconomic status, according to the criteria established by Sisbén III.

Thus, the PAE serves students according to their level of education (early childhood level educational institutions; elementary basic education level educational institutions; elementary education institutions for ethnic groups – indigenous, Afro-Colombians, *raizales*, gypsies – and also serves a high concentration of the population victim of armed conflict or both), according to the Ministry of National Education of Colombia (Colombia, [20–20 to 20b], 2022).

The strategies formulated by the PAE, whose fundamentals correlate the types of dietary supplements and the school day in previously established times and times of consumption are in table I.

Table I – Times and schedules of consumption of the School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) in educational institutions

Food Supplement	School Journey	Moment of Consumption	Time
Breakfast	Morning	Minimum of 20 minutes before starting educational activities or in the early hours of the morning	7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.
Afternoon Food Supplement	Afternoon	Minimum of 20 minutes before starting educational activities or in the early hours of the afternoon	1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Lunch	Single and Afternoon Journey	Minimum of 30 minutes before starting educational activities in the afternoon or 2 to 3 hours after having consumed breakfast	11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Source: Colombia ([20–20b], p. 12, our translation).

Table I – Times and schedules of consumption of the School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) in educational institutions (continuation)

Food Supplement	School Journey	Moment of Consumption	Time
Industrialized reinforced snack	Single and Afternoon Journey	Minimum of 30 minutes before starting educational activities in the afternoon or 2 to 3 hours after having consumed breakfast	11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Industrialized breakfast for emergencies	Morning or afternoon journey	Minimum of 20 minutes before starting educational activities or in the early hours of the morning or afternoon, depending on the school day	7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Snack	Morning or afternoon or single journey	2 to 3 hours after having consumed breakfast, afternoon food supplement, or lunch	9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Source: Colombia ([20--?b], p. 12, our translation).

The Technical Bulletin of Formal Education, presented by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE, original acronym) of Colombia in 2022, reported that 9,729,968 students were enrolled in the public school system, 963,199 in early childhood education, 4,069,302 in elementary school, 3,317,530 in secondary school and 1,379,937 in high school. Of the total number of students, 5,851,769 were benefited by the PAE in the same year, according to the Special Administrative Unit for School Feeding – Food for Learning (UApA, original acronym) (Colombia, 2023b).

The indicators of the School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) and the 2022 DANE bulletin demonstrate the relevance of this State policy for students who receive the School Feeding (SF), but, as previously reported, the PAE is not universal. In this scenario, it is necessary to know the eligibility and ineligibility criteria of the program (Colombia, 2023a).

To reduce socioeconomic inequalities in the country and meet the principles of solidarity, income redistribution, simplification and transfer, Law No. 142/1994 standardized the socioeconomic division of the Colombian population by strata taking residential real estate as a reference and elaborated

the differential tariff regime for basic public services (water, electricity, and gas). The regime was based on a method that considered the socioeconomic characteristics of places, properties, and their surroundings, with the adoption of a surcharge to the industrial, commercial, and higher income sectors and benefits – exemption or reduction of taxes – to the low-income sectors.

Legislation and official documents do not present sufficient elements about the criteria for eligibility and ineligibility of students to the School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym). So, what parameters allow or not the benefit of students of the same socioeconomic level of School Feeding (SF) in Colombia? Perhaps this is an important regulatory weakness.

The strategies³ of the PAE in Medellín envision the following plans: 1. Milk Cup: exclusive procedure of the city of Medellín that aims to expand the coverage of the PAE, by complementing the students' food by offering them a small meal composed of baked goods and a drink; 2. Prepared Food (lunch, morning and afternoon supplement) – a food modality that involves the preparation of food within the educational institution or in an environment close to the school, as indicated by the Ministry of National Education; and, finally, 3. Industrialized Feed: consists of the offer of processed and unprocessed foods – such as fruits – for student consumption at school.

The objectives of the School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) are: I. to increase the frequency and permanence of students in the school system; II. to offer a food supplement with nutritional balance between macronutrients and micronutrients fundamental for the health and learning of students; III. to enable healthy eating habits; and IV. to cooperate with the food security of students.

The PAE was implemented in approximately 457 educational institutions of the city of Medellín, both official and affiliated. Among the strategies planned, the Milk Cup program was recently included with a view to expanding its coverage in the city (Medellín, 2025).

To understand the narratives about School Feeding (SF), we will explain in more detail the methodological paths of the research and then analyze the categories that emerged from this study.

Narratives of different actors on School Feeding (SF) as law, politics, and pedagogical action

Bacca Uribe, Moreno Franco and Restrepo Zapata (2024) stated that the Medellín School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) presents a differentiation, as it is possible that schools located in the most central regions are able to meet most of the objectives and goals endorsed in the official documents of the program. On the other hand, the most peripheral institutions cannot be covered by such expectations due to the lack of equal conditions of the different institutions. This statement can be confirmed in the descriptions made at the beginning of this section.

After reading the interviews produced in this study, three categories emerged from the collaborators' narratives – law, politics, and pedagogical action – for analysis, as detailed in the following section.

Narratives of social actors on School Feeding (SF) as a right

According to Téllez Navarro, Jiménez Rodríguez and Amaya Navas (2023), the School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) aimed at the right to education of children and adolescents with educational institutions, by guaranteeing the right to food in the school context and, consequently, the right to health.

On this issue, the head person of the PAE of School 1 points out that the School Feeding (SF) is not restricted to the right to eat, but collaborates with the right to education by “[...] *ensure that children stay in school. [...] it is a way to attract them to school, to get them involved*” (Castaño, 2025, p. 1).

For the 5th year student of School 1, Ángel Villa, “*The PAE is very good, that we have something to eat, that they provide us with food at school*”. On the other hand, Matias, also a student of School 1, complements with the idea of a nutritious diet: “[...] *it provides too much nutrition to us, the children*” (Villa, 2025, p. 1).

School Feeding (SF), according to these collaborators, contributes to the human right to adequate food, but also the right to nutrition. In the

dimension of law, we realize that it goes beyond the issue of health and, as reported by the person in charge Ligy Castaño (2025), it becomes a seduction resource for students because it allows feelings of belonging to the school institution and, from this perspective, cooperates with the right to education. The guarantee of food at school is intertwined with the right to Food and Nutrition Security (FNS), as well as having repercussions on the right to education.

Narratives of social actors on School Feeding (SF) as a right

Bacca Uribe, Moreno Franco and Restrepo Zapata (2024) point out that, after World War II, from a cooperation agreement signed between the United States of America (USA) and Latin American countries, food assistance begins to be a national concern in Colombia. However, it was only in 1954 that the Colombian central government implemented the Milk Cup Program with the objective of promoting Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) for underprivileged children and improving their learning levels. According to the authors, this can be considered the first School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) instituted in Colombia.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Colombian School Feeding (SF) was based on the distribution of industrialized foods, which was the reason for many complaints about the quality of these foods. Despite these efforts to promote Food and Nutrition Security (FNS), it was only from the 1990s that SF began to assume the tone of state policy and, in 2006, the PAE emerged.

However, it is important to remember that this state policy did not yet have the universalist character of its services, a fact that causes us some concerns about the eligibility and ineligibility of students in the program and makes us reflect on the narrative of Castaño (2025):

[...] I feel very sad because I have the fifth graders, those who eat the most, and I have 17 vouchers, but I have 38 students. Do you know what it means to me to take the students to the PAE? For me, it is torture, because everyone, most people, are hungry... (Castaño, p. 3).

Given the collaborator's concern, we can see that the School Feeding (SF) in Colombia still lacks a structure that can be effectively constituted as a State policy. Allied to this issue, it is also important to focus on the problems that involve corruption schemes of some programs, as stated by Juan Mejía (2025, p. 1), in charge of the PAE of School 3: "[...] A delicate issue is that there are some politicians who use these programs as a way to drain the poorest people in the country, both economically and materially...".

Narratives of social actors on School Feeding (SF) as a pedagogical action

The idea that food has an educational dimension refers to the very act of eating as a pedagogical action, whether in the face of healthy and nutritious food choices, ways of eating, aspects of sociability or cultural identity, both personal and collective (Santos; Soares; Silva, 2024).

About the act of eating at school, the student Messi Acevedo (2025, p. 1) focuses: "[...] I admire food. I like being around my friends [...] because I enjoy being with them, we start talking." In the view of also student Neymar Mosquera (2025, p. 1): "[...] I like it when I talk with my classmates". Finally, the student María Ramírez (2025, p. 1) reinforces the importance of socialization by reporting that: "[...] I like talking with my girlfriends...". That is, for these students, the fact of eating collectively, talking, and enjoying the company of their colleagues represents a powerful pedagogical and sociability action, because it is through interaction with other people that we share knowledge and experiences.

For teacher Sara Gómez (2025, p. 1), the School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) strengthens the meaning of food education because "[...] We also have to form habits of eating, nutrition, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle." Andrés Rodríguez (2025), a teacher at School 3, and Sebastián Arango (2025), a teacher at School 1, corroborate the importance of basic nutrients for learning to happen and, in this regard, Andrés Rodríguez (2025, p. 2) argues that "[...] it is impossible to learn if you don't have the right nutrients for learning." The person in charge Ligy Castaño (2025, p. 3) reinforces that "[...] every space, every action that takes place in the school becomes

a pedagogical moment. [...] For example, a child slipped, and everyone started laughing; for me, that alone is already a learning opportunity, isn't it?". And, finally, for the person in charge Feliz Correa (2025, p. 3), the SF is a pedagogical act: "[...] educators inform them to value what is given to them, [...] that we ourselves pay for it with taxes...". In this last sense, Feliz draws attention to the need to alert students that the PAE exists due to the financing of taxes paid by civil society (tax education), another pedagogical action promoted by the SF.

Final considerations

In this writing, we chose to understand the narratives of different actors on school feeding in three educational institutions in Medellín, Colombia, contemplating *school feeding as law, politics, and pedagogical action*.

Based on the experiences woven in the school environment, the narratives of our collaborators pointed out that *School Feeding (SF) as a right* means offering students at least one complete meal to complement the nutrition of these individuals. Thus, the employees stated that the SF policy seeks to ensure other rights, such as education and health.

The reports of the social actors of the educational institutions surveyed revealed that *SF as a public policy*, despite an important government action, still does not have a universal character and, in this sense, defend the universality of School Feeding Program (PAE, original acronym) in Colombia. This statement demonstrates that the collaborators, through biographical temporalization, aim to transform and build a more equitable social reality for all students in the Colombian public school system.

On the other hand, *SF as a pedagogical action*, what is perceived, through the narratives of school actors. Eating at school can constitute a pedagogical act, as it carries the marks of cultural identities, the importance of the sociabilities of eating and promotes food education within the school context. In addition to these elements, it was evidenced in the testimonials that the entire process of distribution and consumption of food in the educational institution becomes a pedagogical act. From this perspective, eating, food, sharing moments during meals, waiting in line, choosing food, among other situations

are educational-pedagogical actions. Therefore, the defense that the SF cannot be an appendix, a smaller territory within the educational context.

Notes

1. Research conducted at SWE, partnership UNEB and UdeA, in Medellín-Colombia. Integrates the projects "Education, Narrative and Health: right to life and education in time of refigurations" process n. 420371/2022-2 (Call n. 40/2022 - Line B) and "Education, narrative and health in international perspective: biographical learning and experiential collections linked to educational and multiprofessional contexts in health", process n. 442502/2023-O, focused on education, narrative and health, international perspective. Funding CNPq, Brazil, MCTI/CNPq Public Call no 14/2023 - Support to International Scientific Research Projects, Tec. and Innovation, with 23 universities from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Spain, France, Mexico and Portugal.
2. Native people of the islands of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina, descendants of the union between Europeans and African slaves, distinct due to their culture, language (Creole), religious beliefs (Baptist Church) and historical past, like the Antillean communities. The RAIZALES are assisted by some specific socio-cultural policies, plans, and programs (Colombia, 2021, our translation).
3. The names of all strategies used in the PAE were translated by the authors.

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