

# **Spinning Plates: An exploration of the interlinkages between food literacy and food insecurity within the context of extended food aid interventions**

James Thomas Shepherd

Submitted to the University of Hertfordshire in partial fulfilment of the  
requirement of the degree of PhD

May 2026

79,261 Words (excluding references and appendices)

## Acknowledgements

Undertaking this research has been a deeply personal and transformative process, representing the realisation of a long-held ambition that was once thought to be out of reach. I owe many individuals thanks for their support in making this happen. To the stakeholders, practitioners, and beneficiaries who generously shared their time, stories, and experiences. Thank you for your openness and trust. Your voices are the foundation of this research; I hope this work does them justice.

The train of thought frequently didn't stop at every station; there were occasions when the driver appeared to be on strike, and oftentimes a complete derailment was on the cards. To my supervisory team: Dr Aarti Rughoo, Dr Tassos Patokos, and Dr Christopher Nicholas - thank you for your patience, insight, and steady guidance. Your ability to help me to navigate the complexities of this research, whilst gently - and not so gently - nudging me back on track when I veered off course, has been instrumental. I am indebted.

To Dr Tanja Hoffmann – for getting me into this thing in the first place, for being a sounding board and offering sage advice when needed. Truly a wise woman.

To my long-suffering husband, Christian – For your quiet, consistent, and unwavering support, your patience with my frequent ramblings and your ability to nod thoughtfully even when I was deep in the weeds muttering gibberish. I promise never to mention the subject matter of this thesis again...well, almost never!

Finally, for Boodie Velvet, my office companion and best friend. You were by my side through every stage of this research and the journey that led here; you were to be often found faithfully curled up under my desk. Your presence was frequently felt in meetings and calls, occasionally vocally, by snoring in the way only a Labrador can snore, but frequently 'aromatically', in the way only a Labrador can be 'aromatic'! We said goodbye whilst I was writing up this thesis, you leave a big space and not just under the desk ... this is dedicated with love to you and with gratitude for every step we took together.

## Abstract

Where food literacy is promoted as a vehicle for improved resilience, this thesis explores how food insecurity intersects with it. Motivated by the persistence and deepening of poverty and food insecurity within the United Kingdom, this research addresses a critical gap in the literature: the lack of qualitative, multi-stakeholder studies that connect food literacy to the lived experiences of food insecurity. This study aims to understand how food insecurity impacts the acquisition and application of food literacy and how extended food aid interventions support or hinder this process.

Guided by a social constructivist and interpretivist methodology, the research employs qualitative methods including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, conversations, and observations with 40 stakeholders and beneficiaries across diverse UK settings. The theoretical foundations draw upon poverty and social exclusion theories, challenging deficit-based narratives that frame food insecurity as an individual failing.

Findings reveal that whilst most beneficiaries possess a degree of functional food literacy, structural barriers such as affordability, access, and other socioeconomic constraints limit its application. Heuristic factors, including adaptive strategies for sourcing and managing food, emerge as critical components of food literacy. This thesis proposes a novel framework encompassing intrinsic, heuristic, and extrinsic factors of food literacy, with food insecurity acting as a barrier between layers. Extended food aid interventions offer social and cultural benefits but often replicate power imbalances and risk contributing to moral injury amongst practitioners.

The research concludes that food literacy must be understood as socially and culturally embedded, and that interventions must move beyond solely skills-based approaches. Policy reform is called for with improved safeguarding for practitioners and a reassertion of state responsibility in ensuring the right to food. These insights offer practical implications for intervention design, policy development, and future research.

# Contents

## Table of Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>8</b>
1.1 POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM .....	10
1.1.1 <i>Defining Food Insecurity</i> .....	14
1.1.2 <i>Food literacy in the context of food insecurity</i> .....	15
1.1.3 <i>The rise and evolution of food aid</i> .....	17
1.1.4 <i>Why this matters now</i> .....	18
1.2 MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH .....	19
1.3 RESEARCH AIMS, OBJECTIVES, AND QUESTIONS .....	20
1.3.1 <i>Research aim</i> .....	20
1.3.2 <i>Research objectives</i> .....	20
1.3.3 <i>Research questions</i> .....	21
1.4 POSITIONING RESEARCH: ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY .....	23
1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH .....	23
1.6 LIMITATIONS .....	24
1.7 STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS.....	25
<b>CHAPTER 2 - POVERTY, FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD LITERACY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM</b> .....	<b>28</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER .....	28
2.2 POVERTY IN THE UK .....	28
2.2.1 <i>Below Average Resources: Development of a new poverty measure</i> .....	30
2.3 DEFINING FOOD INSECURITY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM .....	31
2.3.1 <i>Levels of food insecurity in the United Kingdom</i> .....	32
2.4 THE PROBLEM WITH FOOD AID .....	33
2.5 DEFINING FOOD LITERACY.....	36
2.6 THE COMPONENTS OF FOOD LITERACY ACROSS LITERATURE .....	43
2.7 FOOD LITERACY IN THE PRESENCE OF FOOD INSECURITY .....	44
2.8 AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT FOOD LITERACY INTERVENTIONS .....	51
2.9 SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF COOKERY INTERVENTION EFFICACY .....	53
2.10 ESTABLISHING THE RESEARCH GAP .....	54
<b>CHAPTER 3 – THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS</b> .....	<b>56</b>
3.0 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER .....	56
3.1 THEORIES ON THE CAUSES OF POVERTY .....	56
3.2 SOCIAL EXCLUSION .....	59
3.2.1 <i>Definitions of social exclusion</i> .....	60
3.2.2 <i>Models and approaches to social exclusion</i> .....	63
3.3 OTHERING, DIGNITY, AND RELATIONAL-SYMBOLIC ASPECTS OF POVERTY .....	67
3.4 SUMMARY .....	68
<b>CHAPTER 4 – METHODS AND METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>70</b>
4.0 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER .....	70

4.1 JUSTIFICATION FOR A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST POSITION .....	71
4.2 CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY .....	73
4.2.1 <i>Types of survey</i> .....	76
4.2.2 <i>The application of emic and etic to the study of human behaviour.</i> .....	81
4.3 ETHICS .....	83
4.3.1 <i>Ethical approval</i> .....	83
4.3.2 <i>Ethical considerations</i> .....	84
4.4 DATA COLLECTION .....	86
4.4.1 <i>First phase</i> .....	88
4.4.2 <i>Rationale for research sample size and recruitment methods</i> .....	91
4.4.3 <i>Characteristics of the research sample</i> .....	92
4.4.5 <i>Stakeholders: interview procedures</i> .....	94
4.4.6 <i>Stakeholders: questions</i> .....	95
4.4.7 <i>Beneficiaries: Recruitment methods and inclusion criteria</i> .....	95
4.4.8 <i>Beneficiaries: Data collection methods</i> .....	96
4.4.9 <i>Observations and field notes</i> .....	97
4.4.10 <i>Addressing variations in stakeholder-to-beneficiary ratios</i> .....	98
4.5 NOTES ON RESEARCH CONTEXT .....	98
4.5.1 <i>Defining food aid interventions</i> .....	99
4.5.2 <i>Settings</i> .....	100
4.5.3 <i>Supply</i> .....	100
4.5.4 <i>Funding streams</i> .....	101
4.6 THEMATIC ANALYSIS .....	102
4.7 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS.....	105
4.7.1 <i>Conceptual foundations and application of CDA</i> .....	106
4.7.2 <i>Researcher positionality and its impact on RTA and CDA</i> .....	108
<b>CHAPTER 5 – CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK - FACTORS OF FOOD LITERACY IN THE PRESENCE OF FOOD INSECURITY.....</b>	<b>110</b>
5.1 THE NECESSITY FOR A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK .....	110
5.2 DEFINING NEW FACTORS OF FOOD LITERACY.....	112
5.3 FOOD LITERACY AS A SYSTEMIC AND RELATIONAL PROCESS .....	114
<b>CHAPTER 6 -INTRINSIC AND HEURISTIC FACTORS OF FOOD LITERACY.....</b>	<b>116</b>
6.1- SUB-THEME 1: FUNCTIONAL KNOWLEDGE .....	117
6.1.1 <i>What is cooking?</i> .....	118
6.1.2 <i>Cooking for pleasure or necessity</i> .....	127
6.1.3 <i>Food agenda and applicability</i> .....	133
6.1.4 <i>Conclusion to functional knowledge sub-theme</i> .....	138
6.2 SUB-THEME 2: DECLARATIVE KNOWLEDGE.....	139
6.2.1 <i>Challenges around knowledge acquisition and application</i> .....	141
6.2.2 <i>Conclusion to declarative knowledge sub-theme</i> .....	145
6.3 SUB-THEME: HEURISTICS .....	146
6.3.1 <i>Aims and context</i> .....	148
6.3.2 <i>Strategies to make food go further</i> .....	150
6.3.3 <i>Profligate spending and financial precarity</i> .....	156
6.3.4 <i>Competition and anxieties</i> .....	160
6.3.5 <i>Barriers to practice</i> .....	163
6.3.6 <i>Capacity</i> .....	164
6.3.7 <i>Sporadic, unpredictable, and inappropriate supply</i> .....	165
6.3.8 <i>Affordability and access</i> .....	168
6.3.9 <i>Context and homelife</i> .....	171
6.3.10 <i>Conclusion to heuristics sub-theme</i> .....	173
6.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION RELATING TO INTRINSIC AND HEURISTIC FACTORS OF FOOD LITERACY ...	173
<b>CHAPTER 7 – EXTRINSIC FACTORS OF FOOD LITERACY .....</b>	<b>175</b>

7.0 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER .....	175
7.1 FOOD CULTURE .....	176
7.1.1 <i>The sharing of food within the context of food insecurity</i> .....	187
7.1.2 <i>The significance of treats</i> .....	191
7.1.3 <i>Conclusion to food culture sub-theme</i> .....	197
7.2 FOOD EDUCATION .....	198
7.2.1 <i>Access to formal food education and socio-economic barriers</i> .....	199
7.2.2 <i>Questioning the efficacy and relevance of formal food education</i> .....	202
7.2.3 <i>Informal and necessity-based learning</i> .....	205
7.2.4 <i>Conclusions to the food education sub-theme</i> .....	207
7.3 FOOD SYSTEMS .....	208
7.3.1 <i>Conclusion to food systems sub-theme</i> .....	214
7.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION RELATING TO EXTRINSIC FACTORS .....	215
<b>CHAPTER 8- EXTENDED FOOD AID INTERVENTIONS: CHALLENGES AND WIDER ROLES.....</b>	<b>216</b>
8.0 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER .....	216
8.1 SPACES OF FOOD PROVISION AS BARRIERS TO ACCESS.....	217
8.2 EXTENDED FOOD AID INTERVENTIONS AS SPACES OF BELONGING .....	224
8.3 NORMALISING FOOD AID.....	231
8.4 THE PERSISTENCE OF STIGMA AND SHAME.....	233
8.5 MORAL INJURY WITHIN THE DELIVERY OF EXTENDED FOOD AID INTERVENTIONS .....	243
8.5.1 <i>Systemic betrayal</i> .....	245
8.5.2 <i>Absorbing trauma</i> .....	248
8.5.3 <i>The moral conflict of failure to meet needs</i> .....	252
8.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS .....	259
<b>CHAPTER 9 – CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>261</b>
9.1 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER .....	261
9.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS .....	261
9.2.1 <i>Interlinkages between food insecurity and food literacy</i> .....	261
9.2.2 <i>Extended food aid interventions</i> .....	267
9.3 EMBEDDING RESEARCH FINDINGS WITHIN ADOPTED THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS .....	270
9.4 RESPONDING TO THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH .....	270
9.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH .....	273
9.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE.....	275
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>278</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>305</b>
<i>Appendix A Integrative overview of the factors of food literacy</i> .....	306
<i>Appendix B PRISMA process for literature relating to adult cookery interventions</i> .....	307
<i>Appendix C Search terms for Prisma Literature Search</i> .....	308
<i>Appendix D Review of literature relating to adult cookery interventions</i> .....	308
<i>Appendix E Thematic Map – Intrinsic Factors</i> .....	311
<i>Appendix F Thematic Map - Heuristic factors</i> .....	311
<i>Appendix G Thematic Map – Extrinsic Factors</i> .....	312
<i>Appendix H Thematic Map – Extended Food Aid Interventions</i> .....	312
<i>Appendix I Question Guides and Prompts for Stakeholders</i> .....	313
<i>Appendix J Question Guides and Prompts for Beneficiaries</i> .....	316
<i>Appendix K Sample Participant Information Sheet</i> .....	319
<i>Appendix L Sample Participant Consent Form</i> .....	322
<i>Appendix M : The nature of EFAI settings or the role of unaffiliated individuals and justification for inclusion</i> .....	323
<i>Appendix N: Participants within the research sample</i> .....	325
<i>Appendix O Example of Post Visit Observation Notes (Anonymised)</i> .....	327
<i>Appendix P Samples of Inductive and Deductive Coding Using NVivo (Anonymised)</i> .....	329
<i>Appendix Q Samples of Inductive and Deductive Coding Using NVivo (Anonymised)</i> .....	329

## List of Tables

Table 1: Identified definitions of Food Literacy. ....	38
Table 2: Definitions of Social Exclusion (Cited in Levitas, 2007). ....	60
Table 3: Distinctions between Poverty and Social Exclusion (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman, 2007). ....	61
Table 4: Attributes of qualitative methodologies and justification for their use (Braun and Clarke, 2013). ....	74
Table 5: Relevant situations for different research methods (Yin, 2014). ....	76
Table 6: Survey type and justification for its use (Braun and Clarke, 2013). ....	77
Table 7: Interview styles and rationale for use (Braun and Clarke, 2013). ....	78
Table 8: Observation methods and rationale for use (Braun and Clarke, 2013). ....	79
Table 9: Data Collection Methods and Number of Participants ....	93
Table 10: The stages of Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) ....	102

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Demographic breakdown of those in poverty in the UK 2022/2023 (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2025). ....	11
Figure 2: Tracked rates of poverty by demographic over time (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2025). ....	12
Figure 3: Tracked levels of poverty over time (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2025). ....	13
Figure 4: Volume of emergency food parcels distributed by Trussell over time (Trussell.org.uk, 2025). ....	18
Figure 5: Calculation of Total Resources Available (TAR). (Department for Work & Pensions, 2025). ....	30
Figure 6: The eleven components of food literacy (Vidgen and Gallegos, 2014, p 54). ....	37
Figure 7: Visualisation of Tripartite Model of Health Literacy (2000). ....	43
Figure 8: The emphasis placed on components of food literacy within literature identified by Truman et al. (2017). ....	44
Figure 9: The four pillars of food security (Begley et al., 2019). ....	46
Figure 10: The characteristics of social exclusion (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman, 2007). ....	65
Figure 11: Characteristics of constructivist and pragmatic research paradigms (Creswell, 2009; Stake, 2010). ....	73
Figure 12: The factors of food literacy within the presence of food insecurity. ....	111
Figure 13: Representative stock within food pantries. ....	122
Figure 14: Representative stock within food pantries ....	123
Figure 15: Representative stock within food pantries ....	123
Figure 16: Stock availability within pantries limits the demonstration of declarative skills. ....	124
Figure 17: Stock availability within pantries limits the demonstration of declarative skills. ....	125
Figure 18: Examples of a food literacy intervention recruitment posters. ....	132
Figure 19: Representative example of food quality in settings. ....	151
Figure 20: Restrictions placed on the number of items available to customers. ....	152
Figure 21: Availability of fresh produce is extremely limited during food pantry trading. ....	161
Figure 22: Restricted quantities of products available were deemed to be unsuitable for larger families. ....	180
Figure 23: Example of inadequate quantities to meet needs at the start of trading. ....	181
Figure 24: Volumes of confectionery at one pantry visited. ....	195

Figure 25: Religious iconography in spaces where food pantries operate.....	220
Figure 26: A broken fridge outside the entry to a food pantry.....	236
Figure 27: Bins and discarded packing crates outside the entry to a food pantry.....	236
Figure 28: Closed shutters outside the entry to a food pantry.....	236
Figure 29: Railings and a lack of signage for a food pantry may be intimidating to new users. ....	237
Figure 30: A number system in operation at a food intervention to control the number of customers accessing at any one time.....	241

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

In the 1930s, whilst visiting Wigan and other northern British towns, the differences in dietary choices between classes were starkly apparent to George Orwell. Observing what the working classes ate, he noted that *'the basis of their diet ... is white bread and margarine, corned beef, sugared tea, and potatoes'* (Orwell, 1937, cited in Jackson, 2020, p. 46). Questioning whether they might spend more on wholesome food like oranges and brown bread, he concluded that, for *'the unemployed, underfed, harassed, bored, and miserable' the appeal of tasty food outweighed any attraction to what he classified as 'dull, wholesome food'*.

Orwell reflected upon his own prejudices formed from his *'self-conscious lower upper middle class'* position, as well as the biases of others. He references *'parties of society dames'* giving shopping lessons to the wives of the unemployed. A communist speaker in London is drawn upon – *'first you condemn a family to live on thirty shillings a week, and then you have the damned impertinence to tell them how they are to spend their money'* (Jackson, 2020, p. 46).

Nearly a century later, the same tensions between structural inequalities, dietary choices, and moral judgements persist. In 2022, MP Lee Anderson claimed, *"there's not this massive use for food banks in this country"* and that *"generation after generation cannot cook properly"* (BBC, 2022b), which not only demonstrably frames food insecurity as an individual failing, but also suggests that the ability to prepare food offers a route out. King Charles III, in his first Christmas message that same year, acknowledged *'this time of great anxiety and hardship... for those finding ways to pay their bills and keep their families fed and warm'* (BBC, 2022a) whilst also praising the generosity of charitable organisations and volunteers donating both food and time.

These perspectives illustrate how food insecurity in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Britain remains embedded within a dialogue of deficit-based narratives that frame poverty as an individual failing, and one that champions charitable provision as the solution. This is in the potential absence of adequate interrogation of the socio-economic conditions that render such charitable assistance necessary in the first place. It is within this space that this research is situated.

This introductory chapter aims to provide the context in which this research is undertaken, and to explore the theoretical foundations on which it is based. It begins by highlighting the persistence and deepening of poverty within the United Kingdom. Consideration is paid to how global events, alongside neoliberal economic policies, have shaped current conditions. A brief examination of contested definitions of food insecurity is provided alongside an explanation of what food literacy is and how it has emerged as a proposed framework with which to address dietary health inequalities. Attention is paid to the rise and evolution of food aid interventions and the associated tensions around social acceptability, stigma, and maintenance of dignity within provision. The chapter concludes by providing the research problem, aims, objectives and research questions, and an overall structure of this thesis.

## **1.1 Poverty and food insecurity in the United Kingdom**

No poverty, zero hunger, and good health and well-being are the first of the United Nations development goals (United Nations, 2023). The relationships between health, income, and deprivation are long-established and well-documented; poorer health generally reduces the possibilities of better life outcomes and opportunities (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023). Whilst UN development goals may feel more appropriate for developing nations, there is a growing applicability within the UK.

The PSE:UK report, the largest ever study of poverty in the UK, found that, despite overall wealth increasing, key aspects of deprivation, such as insufficient income, unemployment, reliance on benefits, and health and education inequities, had also risen, signalling increased polarisation between groups (Office for Statistics Regulation, 2023; University of Bristol, 2014).

Indications show that little traction has been gained in reducing poverty levels in subsequent years. Demonstrably, poverty levels in the UK have worsened. The UK Poverty 2025 report (Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), 2025) states that whilst the

numbers experiencing poverty remain broadly flat and similar to pre-pandemic levels, the level at which it is experienced has deepened, and a sustained fall in poverty levels has not been achieved for over 20 years.

In 2022/2023, 14.3 million people in the UK, or 21% of the population, were in poverty:

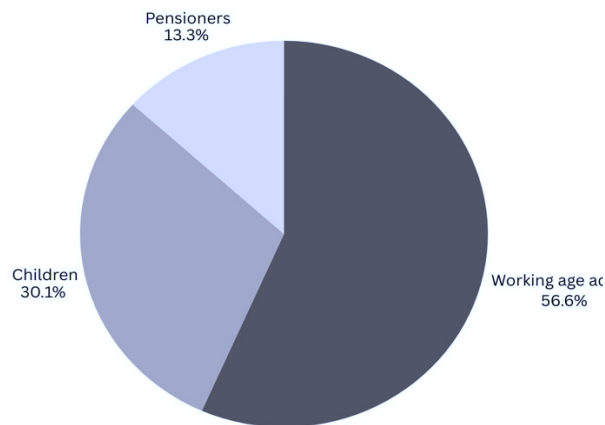
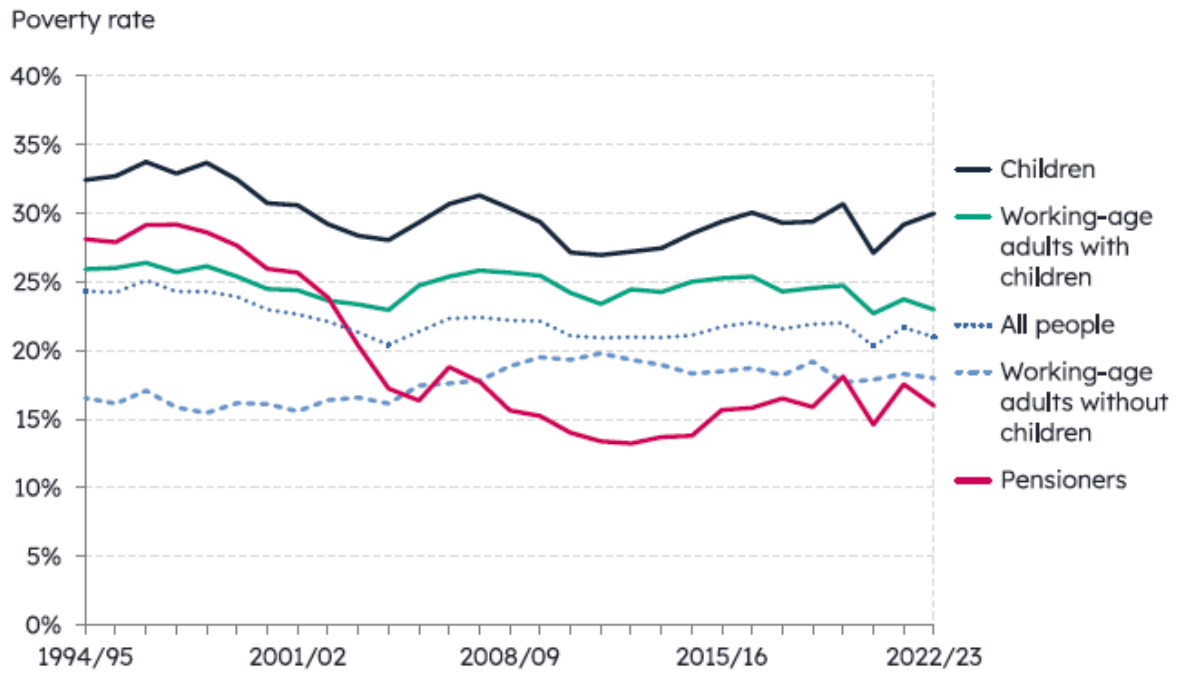


Figure 1: Demographic breakdown of those in poverty in the UK 2022/2023 (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2025).

There were slight rises in child and pensioner poverty, whilst working-age poverty remained unchanged. Where incomes returned to pre-pandemic levels and temporary coronavirus support was withdrawn, these figures show a stabilisation of poverty compared to the previous year.

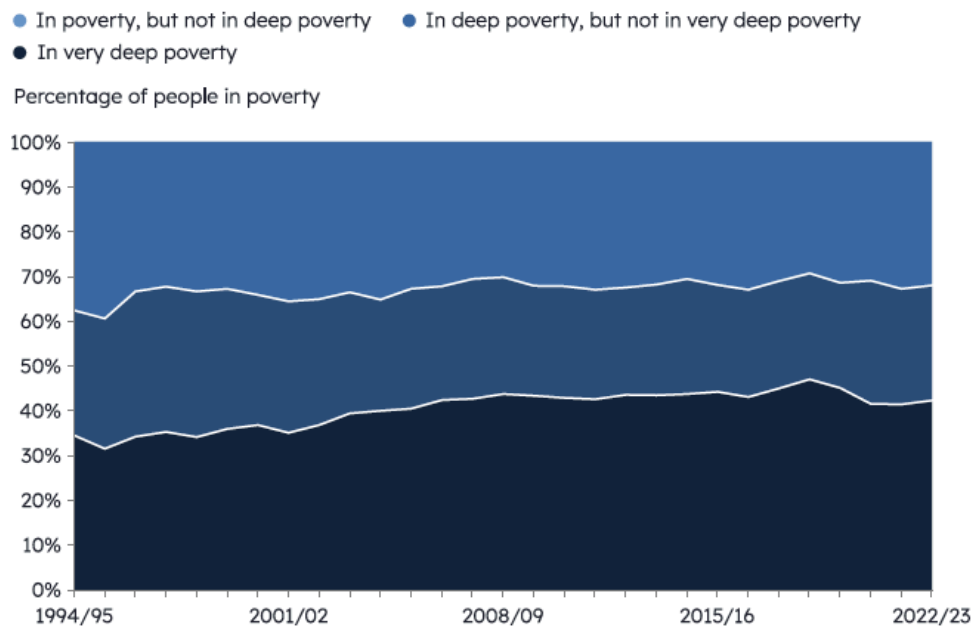
However, the report also indicates that overall rates of poverty have shown little movement across the period in which Conservative-led governments were in power. The last period in which there was a decline in the rate of poverty was between 1999 and 2005. JRF attribute this to economic shocks at a population level, such as the global financial crisis of 2008 and ensuing austerity measures, Brexit, COVID-19, and the war in Ukraine.



Source: Households Below Average Income, 2022/23, DWP

Figure 2: Tracked rates of poverty by demographic over time (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2025).

Most striking is the extent of poverty being experienced. In 2022/23, 40% of those living in poverty were in very deep poverty; incomes fell well below the standard poverty line; Among the poorest families, incomes were on average 57% lower than the poverty threshold, a gap that has widened by 66% over the past 25 years.



Source: Households Below Average Income, 2022/23, DWP

Figure 3: Tracked levels of poverty over time (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2025).

This research has been undertaken within the shadow of significant global events. A cost-of-living crisis has been attributed to the residual effects of the global pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which led to exponential increases in the cost of fuel and food (Economics Observatory, 2024; Francis-Devine et al., 2025). However, the current challenges faced could also be viewed as the cumulative result of years of economic and social failures. Living standards for people on lower incomes have seen no meaningful improvement for the better part of fifteen years (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023). Following the 2008 financial crisis and the introduction of austerity measures, the 2011 Localism Act devolved social responsibilities to underfunded local authorities. Such fundamental changes to the welfare system are examples of the neoliberal policies introduced by successive coalition and Conservative governments. Under these administrations, a demonstrable shift away from social policies to tackle systemic problems, such as poverty and hunger, and a move towards an era of promoting deregulation, individual responsibility, and global markets are being seen as the solution (Lakhani & Uteuova, 2021).

Arguably, austerity measures have exacerbated income poverty and income inequality in the United Kingdom (Oxfam, 2013, cited in Yau et al., 2019). Following a 2018 visit to

the United Kingdom by Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, the dangers associated with this issue were highlighted. *“...But through it all, one actor has stubbornly resisted seeing the situation for what it is. The government has remained determinedly in a state of denial...the voluntary sector has done an admirable job of picking up the slack for those government functions that have been cut or de facto outsourced, but the work is not an adequate substitute for government obligations. By emphasising work as a panacea for poverty against all evidence and dismantling the community support, benefits, and public services on which so many rely, the government has created a highly combustible situation that will have dire consequences” (United Nations, 2018).*

Theories surrounding the causes of poverty vary. Individual and Behavioural theories, for example, are rooted in the belief that the free market provides an opportunity for all. Hard work and productivity are correlated to reward, and therefore poverty is a result of inefficiency, poor individual choices, and the inability to provide for oneself (Brady, 2019). Structural theories consider how meso-demographic and economic factors, such as neighbourhoods, age or gender composition, and urbanisation, can influence poverty (Beacom, 2021). It is argued that failures within the competitive free market, beyond the control of individuals, exacerbate poverty. Marxian theorists argue that social and political factors, such as class division, have the most significant impact on poverty, and that economic growth alone provides limited alleviation of poverty (Beacom et al., 2021). Theories on the causes of poverty will be explored within this thesis and build upon the theoretical foundations on which this research is based.

### **1.1.1 Defining Food Insecurity**

Food security, food poverty, and food insecurity are terms often used interchangeably; however, each carries relevance and applicability within different areas of the food system. The conversation around food poverty in developed countries can be controversial, where, for some, there exists a lingering opinion that food poverty does not truly exist or that it is incomparable to the experiences of those in developing countries (O’Hagan, 2013; Lanchester, 2013, cited in Beacom et al., 2021). A potential lack of

understanding of the term *food poverty*, or how it is experienced, may be exacerbating the issue. O'Connor et al. (2016) place food poverty alongside the more macro-focused term *food security*; the principles of availability, access, utilisation, and stability influence both. Food security is often used at a national or global level regarding availability and whether there is an adequate and safe food supply available to feed entire populations. Food poverty, however, is distinguished by being concerned with the access component at the household level.

Criticism levelled at some earlier definitions of food poverty is attributable to it being defined primarily by quantitative measures. A lack of qualitative analysis omits consideration of both the nutritional content and the quality of food available by focusing mainly on the quantity of food to satisfy hunger. Similarly, the cultural and social components of normal food relationships are overlooked (Furey et al., 1999; Healy, 2019; Hick, 2012; Lambie-Mumford, 2019; O'Connor et al., 2016).

Additionally, whilst there is evidence that some families have always survived 'on the brink', an emergent feature of poverty in neoliberal societies is the precarity of income in deregulated labour markets. New strata of society are experiencing financial pressures, a reduced elastic spend, and the sense of insecurity this engenders (Hirsch & Karagiannaki, 2024). This uncertainty is embedded within the term *food insecurity*, which, whilst evolving from and often used interchangeably with *food poverty*, acknowledges the associated anxieties. For this reason, 'food insecurity' will be used as terminology throughout this research:

*“Food insecurity can be defined as “the inability to consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so”*

(Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2021)

### **1.1.2 Food literacy in the context of food insecurity**

Based on 2018 data, the food budgets of over 50% of UK households were likely to be insufficient to Public Health recommendations of a balanced healthy diet (Scott et al., 2018). Drawing on data referenced within section 1.1 of this thesis, there is a high probability that the percentage of households will be higher. Whilst the debate around the causes of and potential solutions to poverty continues, the fact remains that poverty is intrinsically linked to poorer health and reduced life expectancy (Liu et al., 2024).

At the time of writing in September 2025, a new national food strategy is under development. Within its former incarnation, the National Food Strategy (Dimbleby et al., 2021) suggests that most people believe that there is a simple formula for tackling dietary ill health: education, exercise, food labelling and willpower – Provide information through schools and public health campaigns, encourage people to move more and leave the rest to individual resolve. It is inferred that, as a nation, we are becoming increasingly overweight and suffering the consequences, that we are too lazy and too ignorant to eat well. The overarching message is that if you have the knowledge and ability to make lifestyle adjustments, but choose not to, then the consequences are of your own making.

Increasingly, the term ‘literacy’ is used to describe the knowledge and skills needed to navigate a range of societal systems such as technology, finance, physical exercise, health, and nutrition, with improved resilience being the intended outcome. Through the identification of resilience-building factors, competence can be promoted, health can be improved, adversity can be overcome, and life stressors can be navigated. Literacy can therefore be described as a resource through which an individual can navigate volatility and uncertainty, maintain a degree of stability, and ultimately create resilience (Greene et al., 2003).

From the broader field of health literacy, food literacy has emerged to describe the practical aspects of healthy eating and is increasingly being used in policy, practice, and research. Anecdotally, food literacy is defined as understanding the impact of your food choices on health, environment, and the economy and understanding that these impacts are not experienced equitably (Food Literacy Center, 2015). It is, however, the following that is considered the seminal academic definition:

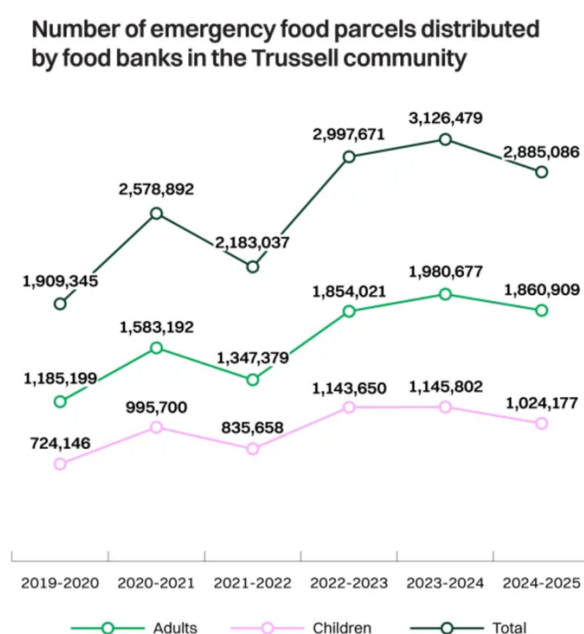
*“Food Literacy is the scaffolding that empowers individuals, households, communities, or nations to protect diet quality through change and strengthen dietary resilience over time. It is composed of interrelated knowledge, skills and behaviours required to plan, manage, select, prepare, and eat food that meets needs and determines intake”.*

Vidgen & Gallegos, 2014, p. 54.

### 1.1.3 The rise and evolution of food aid

The increasingly evident levels of food insecurity in the United Kingdom have seen a range of responses. As an initial mechanism of support, food banks distribute emergency parcels of food, usually enough to last for three days, to individuals and families. In principle, these are accessed via a referral and up to three times a year (Garrat, 2017).

However, the rise of food aid provision and uptake has become increasingly high profile and politicised. In 2010, The Trussell Trust reported distributing 41,000 food parcels, 2014 saw 900,000 and in the year 2024/2025, a total of 2.9 million emergency parcels were distributed (Trussell.org.uk, 2025).



*Figure 4: Volume of emergency food parcels distributed by Trussell over time (Trussell.org.uk, 2025).*

Whilst the efficacy of food aid in addressing the causes of food insecurity is open to debate, these figures demonstrate how interventions are addressing increasing levels of need. Additionally, where food aid has been described as a strategy of last resort for most (Lambie-Mumford & Dowler, 2014), research highlights how issues of stigma and a lack of dignity pervade ‘traditional’ food bank models (Garthwaite, 2016; Power, 2022).

Evolved models of distributing food aid have emerged that seek to minimise the negative association of food aid with higher levels of interaction between donor and beneficiary and proposed increased levels of agency within the process of seeking support (Ziauddeen et al., 2025). Saxena & Tornaghi (2018) situate evolved models of food aid in what they term ‘austerity retail’ as an umbrella term to encompass responses to the dual challenges of increasing food insecurity and food waste challenges. Whilst operating under various titles, such as Food Pantries, Social Supermarkets, or Food Clubs, many of these evolved models provide additional support and services in the form of signposting to professional agencies, community cafes, shared meals, and cookery education. For the purposes of this research, these evolved models will be referred to as Extended Food Aid Interventions (EFAIs).

#### **1.1.4 Why this matters now**

The United Kingdom saw a change of government in July 2024, with the Labour Party winning a significant majority in the general election; this occurred after the majority of fieldwork for this research was completed. However, where it could be construed that this diminishes the relevance of this research, there continues to be a struggle with food insecurity. Whilst the exponential rate of food inflation has begun to decline, it remains high compared to pre-2021 levels. As evidenced, the number of emergency food parcels distributed has continued to rise. Similarly, the numbers reported to be experiencing food insecurity remain significant at an indicative seven million adults (Food Foundation, 2025). The figure is indicative, where many who could be classified as food insecure do

not self-identify as such, so real numbers are likely to be higher (Alliance for Dignified Food Support, 2025). This situates this research as remaining highly relevant.

In addition, it is noteworthy that the non-food related support given by food aid projects is regarded by providers as a key, if not the primary, contribution they make. Formal services such as signposting and informal support such as listening and empathising fall into this provision. The upswing in third sector response implies responsibility is devolving from the state to charities, churches, and faith groups beyond the provision of emergency food and into other areas that could be considered an obligation of the state (Riches, 2011).

A key question arises as to the extent to which local communities can, and should, respond to problems over longer-term strategic protectionist policies being implemented by governments. Similarly, critics suggest that the food charity industry has become a key part of the food aid economy, providing a sticking plaster on the problem, yet having its own agendas for survival. The living conditions created for their beneficiaries are preferable to what they may be if they were absent, but they ultimately remain focused on downstream intervention (Lakhani & Uteuova, 2021).

## **1.2 Motivation for Research**

As has been shown, cookery, which at least from a lay perspective is often treated as synonymous with food literacy, is frequently promoted as a means of alleviating food insecurity. Much of the existing literature assumes a direction of association in which food literacy is positioned as a precursor to food security. Whilst this relationship is widely accepted it risks obscuring the conditions under which food literacy is developed, enacted, and sustained.

This study therefore adopts an alternative analytical focus by examining how food insecurity shapes food literacy. Existing research commonly positions food literacy as an individual attribute that can be improved through education or skills-based interventions. Such approaches often assume a degree of stability in income, access,

time, and resources—conditions that are frequently absent in contexts of food insecurity. As a result, there is a risk that structural constraints are overlooked, and that limitations in food practice are misattributed to individual capability.

By foregrounding food insecurity as a shaping condition, this research recognises that material constraints, including insufficient income, limited access to affordable and nutritious food, inadequate living conditions, energy insecurity, and time poverty, may influence what food-related knowledge or skills can be meaningfully practised or sustained. This perspective allows for the exploration of how food literacy is developed informally and adaptively in response to deprivation, as well as how persistent insecurity may constrain confidence, autonomy, and participation in socially normative food practices.

Examining the influence of food insecurity on food literacy is therefore necessary in order to move beyond skills-deficit explanations and to develop a more context-sensitive understanding of food practices and intervention effectiveness.

### **1.3 Research aims, objectives, and questions**

#### **1.3.1 Research aim**

To explore the interconnections between food insecurity and food literacy within the context of extended food aid interventions in the United Kingdom, examining how these interlinkages are shaped by, and respond to, broader social, cultural, and structural forces and influences.

#### **1.3.2 Research objectives**

The objectives of this research can be categorised into 5 key objectives:

1. To investigate how food insecurity impacts the ability to acquire, demonstrate, develop and sustain the components of food literacy.

2. To examine how extended food aid interventions support, hinder, or otherwise influence food literacy.
3. To capture and critically analyse the perspectives of multiple stakeholders including practitioners, funders, commissioners, and other stakeholders engaged in extended food aid interventions alongside the beneficiaries of these.
4. To explore the wider functions of extended food aid interventions beyond food provision including their impact on elements of food literacy beyond cookery.
5. To assess the implications of these findings for future intervention design and policy development aimed at reducing the impacts of food insecurity or improving food literacy within the United Kingdom.

### **1.3.3 Research questions**

This research seeks to respond to two key questions:

**Q1 – How does the incidence of food insecurity impact food literacy in the case of the UK?**

**Q2 – How do UK extended food aid interventions support food literacy in the context of food insecurity and what are the associated challenges?**

This research focuses on those engaged in the delivery of extended food aid interventions in the UK (stakeholders) and the individuals accessing them (beneficiaries). Interventions include but are not limited to food pantries, social supermarkets, food clubs, and other evolved models of provision that extend beyond emergency food aid parcels. It is acknowledged that food insecurity is not a phenomenon limited to those who accessing such interventions and that there may be multiple reasons that services are not used. However, accessing those individuals who

may be classified as food insecure but do not use food aid interventions is beyond the scope of this research.

The focus on EFAls is not intended as a means of comparison with 'traditional' food bank models, but as a means of accessing a broader or more relational understanding of how food insecurity is experienced and navigated in everyday life. Unlike emergency only models, EFAls more closely approximate routine food practices, including the acquisition, preparation, consumption, and sharing of food. This positioning enables exploration beyond moments of acute crisis and allows insight into how constraint shapes *everyday* food related decisions and behaviours.

A stakeholder analysis guided recruitment to ensure representation from the breadth of actors involved in the commissioning, operation, and accessing of extended food aid interventions. Key groups were identified, primarily drawing upon previous professional experience, and mapped based on their role or function. Existing professional relationships, including those between the University of Hertfordshire and FareShare, as well as the professional networks of the researcher have been leveraged to populate a proportion of the research sample. However, this PhD remains an independent qualitative investigation, the institutional relationship supported access to settings for initial phases of research from which slight adjustments to the mechanisms of data elicitation were made. The relationship had no bearing on the analytical focus of the study. An extent of snowball sampling also utilised recommendations following initial interviews with stakeholders, this was also used to identify potential gaps within the stakeholder analysis. Sampling was considered complete when adequate representation was achieved or no new, relevant information acquired, e.g. data saturation.

Geographical spread is included to allow for the exploration of how local environments may or may not shape the relationships between food insecurity, food literacy, and the role of the extended food aid intervention.

## **1.4 Positioning Research: Ontology and Epistemology**

A social constructivist position is adopted for this research, which is underpinned by the belief that all reality is subjective, multiple, and socially constructed. Reality can only be understood through lived experience, which may differ according to the historical and social contexts of individuals (Creswell, 2009; Stake, 2010). Pragmatic ontological characteristics are acknowledged, such as the recognition that reality is constantly renegotiated and interpreted; this is particularly the case in unpredictable contexts. However, this research is primarily positioned as constructivist, where it is fundamentally exploratory rather than seeking causal explanation or problem-solving.

Epistemologically, an interpretivist/constructivist stance is taken. Knowledge is co-created between the researcher and research participants. Understanding is emergent, facilitated by engagement with participants rather than through detached measurement (Parsons, 2010).

Emic perspectives are acknowledged, which draw upon personal and professional experience in the delivery of food-based interventions within communities. These intersect with etic perspectives as an external researcher, which enables understanding as both an insider and an outsider (Lett, 1990; Morris et al., 1999 cited in Olive, 2014).

This research rejects positivistic notions of a single universal truth, generalisability, and replicability and values the plurality of voices and experiences that contribute to it.

## **1.5 Significance of the research**

This research contributes to existing literature regarding food literacy, food insecurity, and models of food aid delivery. However, through the novel exploration of multiple stakeholder and beneficiary perspectives, food literacy is reframed as a socially and culturally embedded, shaped not only by individual practice but by the context in which

it is practised. Through the integration of theories of social exclusion, narratives framing deficits of food literacy as individual failing are challenged.

This research offers usefulness in the design and delivery of food literacy and food insecurity interventions. Through the exploration of how food insecurity and the interventions to address it are experienced, it offers evidence to support the design and delivery of improved support systems at both an intervention and systemic level.

## **1.6 Limitations**

### *Scope*

This research is limited to the United Kingdom. It is primarily focused on extended food aid interventions such as food pantries, food clubs, social supermarkets, as well as those offering offshoot services such as community meals and cookery classes. The provision of emergency-only models, such as food banks, is excluded, which may limit the breadth of comparison between all food aid interventions.

This research is exploratory. Where this research is concentrated on the intersection of food insecurity and food literacy, the study does not fully explore associated domains such as housing, broader welfare reform and other state interventions or other circumstantial and contextual factors. These are acknowledged as influential.

### *Methodology*

The qualitative, constructivist approach taken within this research privileges depth of experience over breadth of coverage. Whilst this has yielded rich, thick, descriptive data; these are interpretive and context-specific rather than being statistically significant.

Data is reliant upon self-reported accounts from participants which may be subject to recall bias, social desirability bias, or selective disclosure.

Despite reflexive practices to mitigate, there remains a risk that the researcher's positionality introduces potential bias in the interpretation of results.

### *Resources*

Time and financial resources limited the number of sites and participants that could be included; this may restrict the diversity of perspectives. Access to some participants was restricted, e.g. those who may qualify as food insecure but do not access interventions, which constrained these voices from being reflected within the results presented. Where this research has been undertaken for the purposes of acquiring a PhD, it has restricted the number of researchers to one. It is acknowledged that results may vary with the involvement of more researchers.

### *Generalisability*

As is the case with most qualitative studies, these findings are context-bound and cannot be generalised to all food-insecure populations or models of food aid. The findings and conclusions of this research are highly dependent upon the context in which the study was undertaken, the time at which it was undertaken, and the responses of those taking part. This limits the replicability of the research, although it is noted that the findings offer transferable insights into multiple circumstances.

## **1.7 Structure of this thesis**

### ***Chapter 1 – Introduction***

The context of the research has been introduced, outlining the scale and nature of food insecurity in the UK and, broadly, how food literacy might be used to address it. The research aims and objectives have been defined, and the significance of the study has been shown.

## ***Chapter 2 – Literature Review***

Following a systematic approach, existing research and grey literature relating to food insecurity, food literacy, and interventions will be explored.

## ***Chapter 3 – Theoretical Foundations and Research Context***

The conceptual foundations underpinning this research are presented, drawing upon theories of poverty, social exclusion, and social justice. This framework provides a lens through which research findings are interpreted.

## ***Chapter 4 – Methods and Methodology***

The research design, methodological rationale, and data collection methods are explained alongside ethical considerations. This chapter will justify the chosen qualitative approach as well as outlining how the data collected has been processed.

This chapter also provides the further context of the research, definitions, and classification of those participating within it.

## ***Chapter 5 – Conceptual Framework***

An emergent conceptual framework (Figure 12) is proposed that integrates and supports increased understanding of interplay between the two strands of food literacy and food insecurity as elicited from this research.

## ***Chapter 6 - Intrinsic factors of food literacy***

Findings of themes emerging from the research data about functional skills and knowledge are presented and discussed.

## ***Chapter 7 – Extrinsic factors of food literacy***

Findings of themes emerging from the research data concerning broader aspects of food literacy are presented and discussed.

### ***Chapter 8 – Extended food aid interventions***

Findings of themes emerging from the research data regarding extended food aid interventions and the volunteers supporting them are presented and discussed.

### ***Chapter 9- Conclusions***

This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the research and offers recommendations for future work as well as considering any limitations of this research.

## **Chapter 2 - Poverty, food insecurity and food literacy in the United Kingdom**

### **2.1 Introduction to chapter**

This chapter explores definitions and measurements of poverty and food insecurity, focusing on how definitions, that reflect both absolute and relative dimensions, support better understanding and inform solutions. Definitions and component factors of food literacy are also examined where it is proposed as a tool of mitigation. Finally, exploration of interventions targeting food literacy skills takes place.

### **2.2 Poverty in the UK**

The subject of poverty, its effects, and solutions to it is unavoidably political in nature. Many policy actors assert that it cannot be justified and must be tackled; others rebuff this and interpret poverty as an unavoidable consequence of economic failure, extending to define it as a reward for ‘individual fecklessness’ (Bramley, 2016). Whilst there is a growing consensus that poverty extends to more than a lack of income, there is more divergence around the components that should be selected for inclusion in any definition.

The Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK project (PSE:UK) ran from 2010 to 2014 and was the largest ever study of poverty in the UK (Gordon, 2017; Main & Bradshaw, 2012); using rigorous qualitative and quantitative methods it examined the multidimensional nature of poverty; especially identified were those living below what the public agrees is a minimum standard of living. The study found that, despite the UK becoming wealthier, key aspects of deprivation had risen. The report suggests that poverty is not just about living on low incomes, but about being unable to afford what we all consider to be the basic necessities of life. More recently, The Joseph Rowntree Report (2023) acknowledges the challenge as not a passing cost of living crisis but the result of an accumulation of years of economic and social failures, with over a decade of ‘no

meaningful improvements' in living standards, particularly for those on lower incomes. Edmiston (2022) interrogates the apparent flatlining of poverty levels in the UK and argues that there is a need to reconceptualise poverty with less opacity around the heterogeneity within the concept of 'the poor'; where the arbitrary 'relative poverty line' buckets everyone together there is a risk of obscuring fluctuations in changing income dynamics, socio-demographics and concentrations of poverty. Edmiston proposes that there is a need to deploy a plurality of approaches to poverty measurement to enable greater understanding of how and why people move in and out of hardship but also along "the continuum of disadvantage". They go on to state that official statistics around poverty are not fit for purpose; that they fail to capture the socio-demographic composition and depth of poverty which constrains understanding of the problem. This is important because it is the dominant measures of poverty that guide how we come to appraise and understand the problems and, therefore, the policies deemed appropriate or necessary to tackle them.

The multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI) (Santos & Alkire, 2011) measures acute poverty, the proportion of people who experience multiple deprivations and the intensity of such deprivation. Within the proposed MPI, 10 indicators of poverty are categorised into 3 dimensions: health, education and living standards. The MPI has two characteristics: not reaching the agreed minimum international standards of basic functioning and not reaching several aspects at the same time. Within the dimension of health, deprivation occurs if 'any adult or child for whom there is nutrition information available is malnourished.' Public Health England categorise overweight and obesity as a form of malnourishment; analysis by equivalised income quintile evidenced income differences impact diet and nutrition intakes, particularly in fruit and vegetable consumption across all age groups; the highest and lowest income quintiles were the most polarised (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022). The destitution in the UK report (Bramley et al., 2018) defines people as destitute if they have lacked two or more of six essentials within a month's period due to unaffordability: shelter, food, heat, light, appropriate clothing, and footwear for the prevailing weather conditions and basic toiletries. Arguably, many of those in the UK identified as falling into poverty could be categorised as destitute. However, Walker (2019) raises concern regarding the

measurement of poverty through multidimensional indicators or indices. Firstly, what are the appropriate weightings to apply to the component dimensions in creating an overall poverty score and, secondly, substitutability, i.e., the extent to which one ‘highly weighted’ index might be offset by a lower one. Additionally, to be considered ‘in poverty’ should an individual ‘qualify’ in all areas (the intersection definition), or just in one (the union definition)? Fundamentally, using multiple indicators may deny researchers the knowledge of an impact of an intervention targeting a single outcome has on the overall.

### 2.2.1 Below Average Resources: Development of a new poverty measure

At the time of writing in September 2025, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is developing a new measure for poverty within the UK (Department for Work and Pensions, 2025). Based on an approach proposed by the Social Metrics Commission, it is suggested that the Below Average Resources (BAR) approach will offer a more expansive view of available resources than income measurement. Notably, it is suggested that the BAR measure will offer stronger correlation with other poverty measures such as material deprivation and food insecurity.

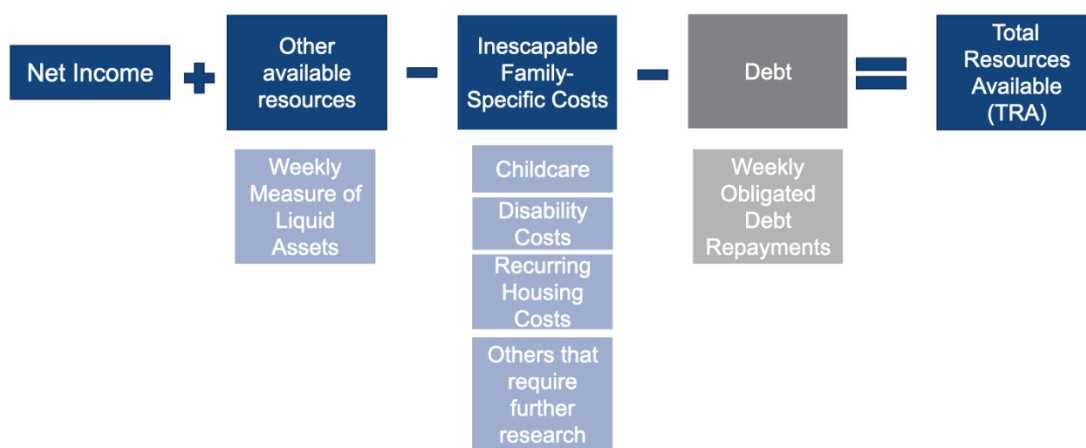


Figure 5: Calculation of Total Resources Available (TRA). (Department for Work & Pensions, 2025).

Notably, within the BAR approach, the commission found little evidence to support a decision on a threshold below which a family would be considered to be in poverty, and

that such a decision would be arbitrary. However, a threshold has currently been set at 54% of the median total resources available (Figure 5). Whilst still within a consultation phase, this novel methodology may offer increased utility in accommodating what, arguably, should be categorised as poverty in order to support those experiencing it adequately.

### **2.3 Defining food insecurity in the United Kingdom**

The conversation around food poverty in developed countries can be controversial, where, for some, there exists a lingering opinion that food poverty does not truly exist or that it is incomparable to the experiences of those in developing countries (O'Hagan, 2013; Lanchester, 2013, cited in Beacom et al., 2020). A potential lack of understanding of the meaning of the term food poverty, or how it is experienced, may be exacerbating the issue. O'Connor et al. (2016) place food poverty alongside the more macro-focused term food security; the principles of availability, access, utilisation, and stability influence both. Food security is often used at a national or global level regarding availability and whether there is an adequate and safe food supply available to feed entire populations. Food poverty, however, is distinguished by being concerned with the access component at the household level. A recurring critique within the literature is that many early conceptualisations of food poverty are grounded predominantly in quantitative measurement. This emphasis on volume and caloric sufficiency often marginalises qualitative considerations, including nutritional quality, food standards, and the social and cultural practices that shape everyday food relationships (Furey et al., 1999; Healy, 2019; Hick, 2014; Lambie-Mumford, 2018; O'Connor et al., 2016).

It is problematic to separate the basic human dietary requirements for survival from the social interactions around food (Lupton, 1996, cited in O'Connell and Brannen, 2021). Lupton states that there is significantly more benefit to be leveraged from an adequacy of food than filling the stomach, that there are emotional and sensual responses to the act of food provision. Food tastes and practices are a fundamental means by which all strata of society enact and express both their connectivity and distinctiveness.

Significantly, it is the family habits which mould food practices and preferences; what people eat, how it is prepared and shared not only establishes position within a hierarchical system of social distinction, but also encourages socialisation, establishes gender and generational hierarchies and ‘acculturates’ children into customary cuisines (Bourdieu, 2010; Warde, 1997 cited in O’Connell and Brannen, 2021).

A definition provided by O’Connor et al. goes some way towards accommodating the nuances associated with food poverty by introducing the terminology ‘socially acceptable’. Not only is how food procured referenced, but also the less tangible outcomes of having an adequate supply: “*The insufficient economic access to an adequate quantity and quality of food to maintain a nutritionally satisfactory and socially acceptable diet*” (O’Connor et al., 2016 p429).

However, whilst there is evidence that some families have always survived ‘on the brink’, an emergent feature of poverty in neoliberal societies is the precarity of income in deregulated labour markets, new strata of society are experiencing financial pressures, a reduced elastic spend, and the sense of insecurity this engenders (Hirsch and Karagiannaki, 2024). This uncertainty is embedded within the term *food insecurity*, which, whilst evolving from and often used interchangeably with *food poverty*, adds the crucial element of *the uncertainty that they will be able to do so*. For this reason, food insecurity will be used as terminology throughout this research:

*‘The inability to consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.’*

FAO.org, (2023).

### **2.3.1 Levels of food insecurity in the United Kingdom**

The justification for revision to how poverty is measured, as shown in subsection 2.2, is further supported by the increasing levels of food insecurity within the UK, and broadening of the demographics of those experiencing it. In 2023/24, 11% of the UK population, or 7.5 million people lived in food-insecure households (Food Standards

Agency, 2024). This figure represents a significant increase from previous years, a representative 24% of people in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland reported food insecurity between October 2023 and January 2024. This was a rise from 15% in 2021.

The impacts of increasing levels of food insecurity extend to more than an absence of food. Utilising the 2015/16 living costs and food survey, alongside disposable income data from the 2015/16 family resources survey, Scott et al. (2018) suggest that there are several indicators that low-income households in the UK may be struggling to follow the Eatwell Guide. This is evidenced through differential nutrient intakes and diets, increasing food bank usage, and higher childhood obesity statistics in deprived areas. The 2025 Broken Plate Report indicates that the most deprived fifth of the population would need to spend 45% of their disposable income on food to afford the constituents of the government recommendations for a healthy diet. This figure rises to 70% of elastic household spending for families with children (Food Foundation, 2025).

## **2.4 The problem with food aid**

The rise in emergency food aid has been a response to the rising issue of food insecurity within the U.K.; DEFRA define food aid as encompassing a range of different types of short-term assistance with food, including on-site and home-based meal provision (Food Ethics Council, 2014). The rise of food aid provision, particularly in the form of food banks providing parcels of food, has become increasingly high profile and politicised. O'Connell and Brannen (2021) propose that in consumer societies, exercising choice in the marketplace, including what food to buy and eat, is a mechanism of enacting agency; exclusion from choice and having an overreliance on donated food may be widely seen as socially unacceptable.

There is increasing pertinence, where the growth of charitable food assistance is situated within a context of rising food, fuel, and housing costs, in addressing the causes of food insecurity. Similarly, there are considerable challenges faced by stakeholders

across academia, government and the third sector in identifying with whom the responsibility lies for addressing the need and how effective, scaled-up responses might be delivered within a highly complex, and potentially uncoordinated policy framework (Lambie-Mumford and Dowler, 2014). Food aid is commonly a strategy of last resort (Hossain et al., 2011; Goode, 2012). Evidence highlights that whilst providing relief from the symptoms of poverty, it does little to address the underlying causes of need. That is not to negate the role of the food aid provider. Notably, the perception by many providers of the non-food support, such as a listening ear or signposting of services, is that the providers of food aid projects regard as a key, if not the primary, contribution to mitigating the symptoms of poverty (Hirsch and Karagiannaki, 2024).

However, the upswing in third sector responses to mitigating hunger and food insecurity could be considered demonstrative of the devolved responsibility of the state and that the burden for ensuring access to food is being placed at the doorstep of charities, churches, and others. Exploration of the issues around disentangling national, regional, and local distinctiveness problems and the appropriate responses required is necessary (Lambie-Mumford and Dowler, 2014).

Where food aid provides immediate, but arguably temporary, relief it does little to address the root causes of food insecurity. Resilience theory argues that it is not the nature of adversity that is most important but how we deal with it (Moore, 2019). Rutter (2012) defines resilience as a reduced vulnerability to environmental risk experiences, the overcoming of stress or adversity, or achieving a relatively good outcome despite risk experience. It is notable that resilience is not a constant and may be present in fluctuating levels of capacity at different life points. Greene et al. (2003) state that resilience involves a transactional, dynamic process of person-environment exchanges, involves competence in daily functions, is influenced by diversity including race, gender, age, sexual orientation, economic status, and religious persuasion as well as physical and mental ability. Significantly, resilience is affected by the availability of environmental resources and is influenced by power differentials. Resilience is not limited to the individual; Masten (2014) and Southwick et al. (2014) define resilience as the capacity of

a dynamic system to adapt successfully to significant challenges that threaten its function, viability, or development.

However, resilience is not without its own critique. Drawing from research into the way that resilience can be, and has been, applied to Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) families and communities in ways that are biased, stigmatising and pathologizing Sims-Schouten and Gilbert (2022) argue that current definitions of resilience need to be redefined and reconceptualised, particularly in settings dominated by white middle class voices that define what *'positive emotions'*, *'successful traits'* and *'coping mechanisms'* are. The authors state that the link between the concept of resilience and neoliberalism has been challenged in a broad range of applications from disaster relief to social work, and from engineering to education. These discussions showcase the links between neoliberalism and the notion of individual responsibility and how there is scope to further disadvantage specific groups and ignore structures of power and inequality.

It is argued by Cretney (2014) that resilience has fast become a popular catchphrase used by governments, international finance organisations, non-governmental organisations, community groups and activists globally. However, there is possible confusion; whilst resilience can speak to a desire to successfully respond and adapt to disruptions outside of the status quo, criticism has also been raised regarding the use of resilience to justify projects informed by neoliberal ideologies that aim to decrease state involvement, increase community self-reliance, and restructure social services.

The concept of 'literacy' is now commonly applied to a wide range of social domains, including health, nutrition, finance, and technology, where it is positioned as a means of supporting individuals and communities to cope with complexity and uncertainty. Within this framing, literacy is often associated with the development of resilience, enabling people to manage challenges and maintain stability in the face of adversity (Greene et al., 2003). Key issues in the world of resilience theory and social work include the identification of protective factors and using these to inform interventions, the use of practical applications to promote the capacity and strength of individual clients, societies and communities and understanding how policy and service promote or hinder

wellbeing, social and economic justice. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located within the interactions between people (Hernandez et al., 2021). Sorensen et al. (2012) assert that literacy includes contextual and societal transformation.

## 2.5 Defining food literacy

The literacy framework for action (Cullen et al., 2015) shows food literacy as the juncture where community food security and individual food skills intertwine; for example, whilst an individual may be proficient in food skills, their community may not be food secure or vice versa. Food literacy has emerged as its own terminology from the broader field of health literacy to describe the everyday practicalities associated with healthy eating and is increasingly being used in policy, practice, and research. Anecdotally, food literacy is described as understanding the impact of your food choices on health, environment, and economy and understanding that these impacts are not experienced equitably (Food Literacy Center, 2015).

*“Food Literacy is the scaffolding that empowers individuals, households, communities, or nations to protect diet quality through change and strengthen dietary resilience over time. It is composed of interrelated knowledge, skills and behaviours required to plan, manage, select, prepare, and eat food that meets needs and determines intake”*

*(Vidgen and Gallegos, 2014, p. 54)*

At the time of writing, Vidgen and Gallegos remains the seminal and most cited (n = 1119) definition of food literacy within the academic literature explored, the need for Vidgen and Gallegos’ research followed a call to action from nutrition professionals working in areas which they considered might contribute to food literacy; nutritional quality of dietary intake was therefore the primary outcome of interest and, although food literacy is likely to contribute to areas beyond nutrition, this particular research did not allow for exploration beyond health.

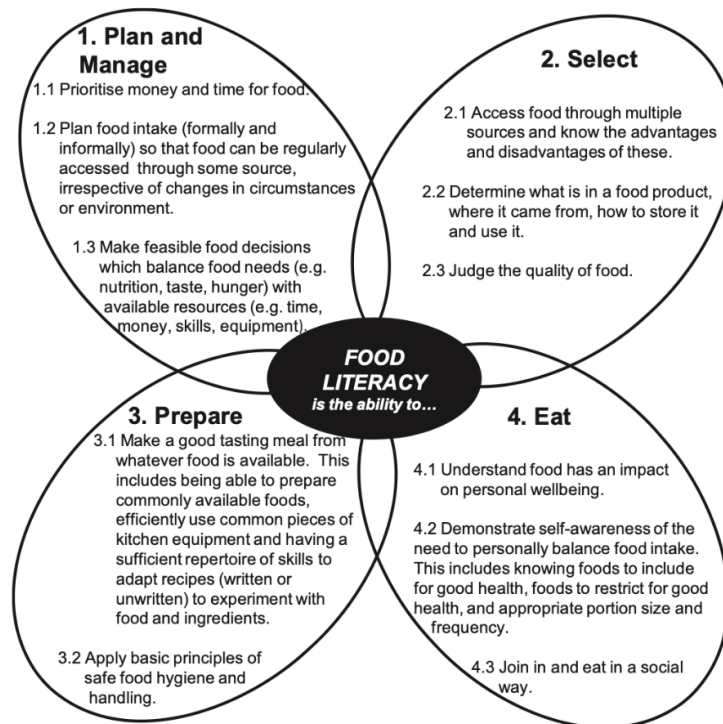


Figure 6: The eleven components of food literacy (Vidgen and Gallegos, 2014, p 54).

Four domains of food literacy (Figure 6) were identified by Vidgen and Gallegos (2014) into which eleven components sit. For the authors, it is these components, and the complex interplay between them, that define food literacy and what “*is needed in the everyday practicalities of meeting nutrition recommendations*” (Vidgen and Gallegos, 2014, p. 57). The authors do highlight the significance of context and how that introduces complexity to the development of a standardised measure of food literacy. Nonetheless, these eleven components can be understood as requiring the acquisition and demonstration of individual behaviours.

It is suggested by Hernandez et al. (2021) that food literacy appears to be situated within two paradigms; the first is apolitical, highly individualistic and lacking an overt consideration of the wide-ranging social or ecological context. Conversely, the second considers broader environmental, social, economic, cultural, and political forces implicit within food literacy. Therefore, it becomes necessary to explore how different

models and definitions of food literacy are applicable within the context of poverty and food insecurity.

This exploration is especially pertinent when, without a common understanding, there are no shared identifiable variables and indicators for analysis, parameters for inquiry or measurement tools. This limits progress in providing practical tools and tailored methodologies for teaching, education, and learning, as well as policy and programme development, implementation, and evaluation (Pleasant et al., 2016; Rosas et al., 2019; Palumbo, 2016, cited in Hernandez et al., 2021).

*Table 1: Identified definitions of Food Literacy.*

Author(s)	Definition
Anonymous (Cited in Cullen et al., 2015)	“... education in every grade teaches kids to grow, cook and compost”
Block et al. (2011)	“... as more than knowledge; it also involves the motivation to apply nutrition information to food choices. Whereas food knowledge is the possession of food-related information, food literacy entails both understanding nutrition information and acting on that knowledge in ways consistent with promoting nutrition goals”
Bublitz et al. (2011)	“...expands traditional measures of nutrition information to include not only what people know about food but their ability to use that information to facilitate higher levels of food wellbeing. Food Literacy ranges from declarative types of knowledge (e.g., knowing what asparagus is and what types of nutrients asparagus might provide) to procedural knowledge (e.g. how to cook this vegetable)
Cullen et al (2015)	“...is the ability of an individual to understand food in a way that they develop a positive relationship with it, including food skills and practices across lifespan in order to navigate, engage, and participate within a complex food system. It’s the ability to make decisions to support the achievement of personal health and a sustainable food system considering environmental, social, economic, cultural and political components”
Desjardin et al. (2013)	“...a set of skills and attributes that help people sustain the daily preparation of healthy, tasty, affordable meals for themselves and their families. Food literacy builds resilience, because it involves food skills (techniques, knowledge and planning ability), the confidence to improvise and problem solve, and the ability to access and share information.
Kolasa et al. (2001)	“.....the capacity of an individual to obtain and nutrition information and services and the competence to use that

	information and services in ways that are health-enhancing.”, interpret and understand basic food
Krause et al. (2018)	“...as a comprehensive concept including a variety of skills and abilities needed for a healthy relationship with food and to participate and engage for a sustainable food system.”
Lawlis et al. (2019)	“... the relative ability to understand the nature of food, its importance, and understand how to use information about food for better health outcomes “
Palumbo et al.(2019)	“...concerns the ability to collect and process relevant information to properly use food in a perspective of enhanced physical and psychic well-being.” And “food literacy includes the individual skills and abilities which are needed to properly use food in order to: achieve health enhancement, contribute to the development of a sustainable agriculture, and concur in the accomplishment of social equity outcomes.”
Pendergast et al (cited in Cullen et al., 2015)	“...capacity of an individual to obtain, interpret and understand basic food and nutrition information and services as well as the competence to use that information (in ways) that are health enhancing”
Perry et al. (2017)	“...builds resilience, because it includes food skills (techniques, knowledge and planning ability), the confidence to improvise and problem-solve, and the ability to access and share information, and is made possible through external support with healthy food access and living conditions, broad learning opportunities, and positive sociocultural environments”
Rawl et al (cited in Cullen et al., 2015)	“Focuses on food and nutrition information to help individuals make appropriate eating decisions”
Slater et al. (2013)	“Functional food literacy: basic communication of credible, evidence-based food and nutrition information, involving accessing, understanding and evaluating information. Interactive food literacy: development of personal skills regarding food and nutrition issues, involving decision making, goal setting and practices to enhance nutritional health and well-being. Critical food literacy: respecting different cultural, family and religious beliefs in respect to food and nutrition (including nutritional health), understanding the wider context of food production and nutritional health, and advocating for personal, family and community changes that enhance nutritional health.”
Thomas and Irwin (cited in Cullen et al., (2015)	“...a complex, interrelated, person centred set of skills that are necessary to provide and prepare safe and nutritious, and culturally acceptable meals for all members of one’s household”
Thomas et al. (2019)	“...includes interconnected attributes organized into attributes of food and nutrition knowledge; food skills; self-efficacy and confidence; food decisions and ecologic (external factors).
Truman and Elliot (2019)	“...Conceptualized as a set of food related skills that, if appropriately adopted, empower the individual to make informed choices”

Vidgen and Gallegos (2014)	“...describes the everyday practicalities associated with navigating the food system and using it in order to ensure a regular food intake that is consistent with nutrition recommendations” and “food literacy is the scaffolding that empowers individuals, households, communities or nations to protect diet quality through change and strengthen dietary resilience over time. It is composed of a collection of inter-related knowledge, skills and behaviours required to plan, manage, select, prepare and eat food to meet needs and determine intake.”
----------------------------	--

Following a literature search, seventeen definitions of food literacy were identified (Table 1), with some offering other facets that may provide more relevance in food-insecure environments than in ones where supply is plentiful. Similarly, where the definition of literacy extolled by Vidgen and Gallegos (2014) could be interpreted as requiring individual behaviour change to adapt to the external environment, others proffer constructs that could be construed as more holistic in nature. There is commonality within all definitions regarding the acquisition of, and ability to utilise, knowledge and skills, marking these out as fundamental if food literacy is to be achieved and demonstrated. However, it is where the author’s definition goes beyond these criteria that differences can be found.

Primarily, these differences concern the extent to which a definition of food literacy could be considered individualistic or not. Perry et al. (2017), for example, use the terminology for various components of food literacy as intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic, or person centred, ultimately requires adaptation to a system by the individual over which they potentially have little or no control. Definitions (Table1) that could be considered to be intrinsic: Block et al., 2011; Bublitz, 2011; Kolasa et al., 2001; Krause et al., 2018; Pendergast et al., 2011; Thomas and Irwin, 2011; Vidgen and Gallegos, 2014.

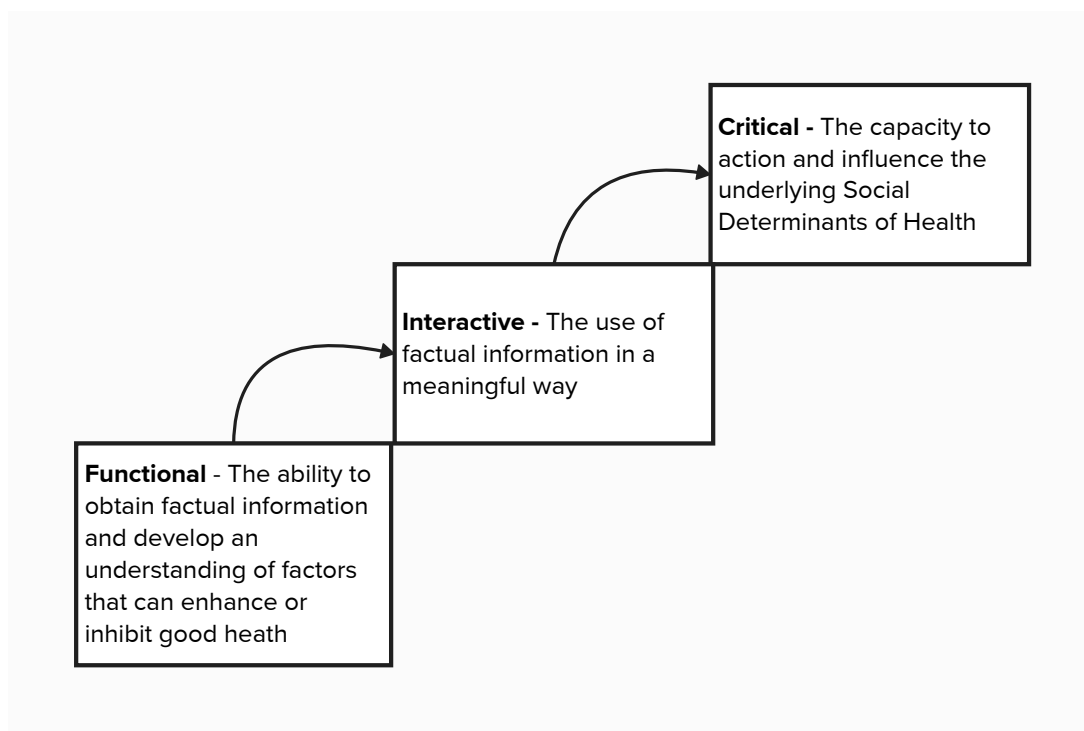
Extrinsic elements, however, recognise the contribution of forces beyond the individual in the achievement of food literacy. Thomas et al. (2019), for example, recognise the impact of environmental factors on an individual’s capacity to develop and apply the knowledge, skills and behaviours that are essential to healthy eating; they suggest that it may be more useful and necessary to utilise ‘attributes’ and ‘predictors’ as terminology.

Attributes comprise characteristic and inherent parts of food literacy, whilst predictors provide a category into which the underlying contextual conditions that influence one's ability to adhere to or practice food literacy can be placed. Perry et al. (2017), following a scoping review, broadly agree. It is asserted that pragmatic (skills) and notional (knowledge) components are effective only in combination with self-efficacy and confidence. Separately, the macro and meso systems that interact with everyday food decisions and practices, termed 'ecologic' factors, are extrinsic to the individual. Determinants include both socio-economic and socio-cultural influences. Food decisions are influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors in combination. Therefore, for an individual or population to be deemed 'fully food literate' and to engage within their food system an ecological approach is required where individual behaviours and skills cannot be separated from their environmental or social context.

Slater et al. (2018) propose a framework of competencies which interact to support with food literacy for young adults. Demonstrably ecologic in nature and considerate of context, it is comprised of functional, relational, and system competencies. Here, food literacy consists of more than the ability to carry out tasks and comprehend the impact of food decisions on the individual; concepts such as understanding and maintaining an equitable and sustainable food system alongside the enjoyment of the food itself and the secondary societal benefits are introduced. Whilst offering a framework that acknowledges the breadth of areas that a positive relationship with food can offer it is, perhaps, idealistic and fails to acknowledge the challenges introduced when a scarcity of food, or the food itself is unaffordable, exists. Whether, when the household elastic spend for food is stretched to the maximum, individual priorities differ to those of the food system may require further investigation.

Health literacy, from which food literacy as an independent area of research is derived, is comprised of the cognitive and social skills which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to *gain access to, understand and use* information in ways in which promote and maintain good health (Nutbeam, 2000 and Sorensen et al., 2012 cited in Velardo, 2015) which introduces a notion of empowerment at the core of the conceptualization. Velardo suggests that positive attitudes, skills, and behaviours are

elicited through the promotion of health literacy. Nutbeam's model for health literacy (Figure 7) offers three sequential levels: functional, interactive, and critical, which is arguably more dynamic than the arguably static nature of some proposed FL variations. It is the critical element, comprised of both individual and community capacity for social action to address barriers to good health, that frames health literacy as a social issue and not just an intellectual and individual one; critical health literacy can be further conceptualized as a form of 'health citizenship' which empowers individuals to unite in a social and political process that acts to modify the underlying causes of health inequalities. Slater et al. (2013) build on Nutbeam's model with functional, interactive components of food literacy within their definition. However, where the concept of critical health literacy is advocated as a tool for social action, critical food literacy, in this context, is concerned with broader understanding and respect of cultural differences and the advocating of personal, family and community changes that enhance nutritional health. Exploration around progressive frameworks of food literacy that promote social and structural change may be beneficial.



*Figure 7: Visualisation of Tripartite Model of Health Literacy (2000).*

Of the sixteen identified definitions of food literacy, just one (Block et al., 2011) recognises the involvement of motivation to apply nutrition knowledge and food skills. Whether the extent to which having the knowledge and skills is sufficient to elicit positive change, or how potential barriers beyond individual change are mitigated requires exploration. Where Vidgen and Gallegos suggest that food literacy ‘empowers individuals, households, communities, or nations’ there is, perhaps a challenge, in applying a single set of criteria for each identified category. Exploring how defining each group as food literate, independent of each other but contributing to a whole may be beneficial, particularly for gaining an increased understanding of the barriers to achieving literacy and, potentially, the relevance of macro and meso factors for individuals experiencing different socio-economic pressures and their impact on the ability to demonstrate resilience.

## **2.6 The components of food literacy across literature**

As with the definitions of food literacy there is also a lack of consensus regarding its constituent components. Following a scoping review, Truman et al. (2017) emphasise the acquisition of two forms of knowledge: critical, i.e., information and understanding and functional, i.e., skills and abilities, as imperative. Further analysis of novel definitions of food literacy revealed the prevalence of six core themes: skills and behaviour, food and health choices, culture, knowledge, emotions, and food systems. However, investigating the weighting of importance given to each suggests a bias towards knowledge related outcomes.

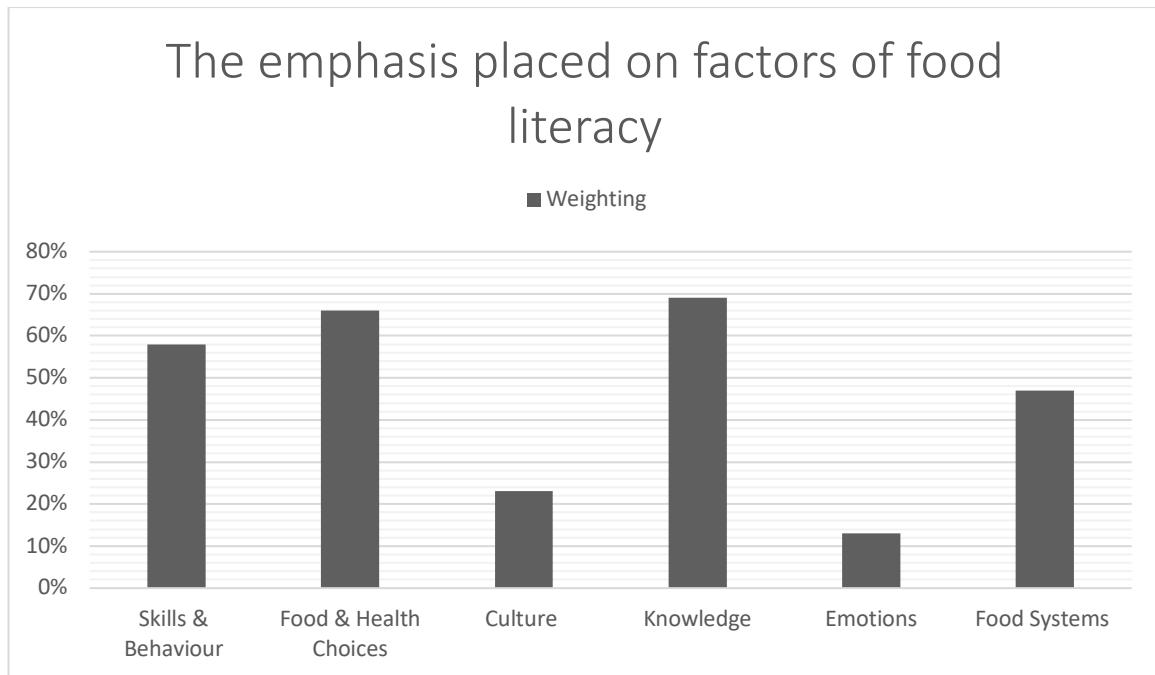


Figure 8: The emphasis placed on components of food literacy within literature identified by Truman et al. (2017).

Drawing from the literature from which the definitions of food literacy were sourced (Table 1), a similar process of mapping and categorisation of factors of food literacy was undertaken for this research (Appendix A). There is consensus that, for an individual to be classified as food literate, the ability to demonstrate skills is a fundamental component. There is similar consistency regarding the ability to demonstrate nutritional knowledge, technical ability and exercising the provision of food in a safe way. Hernandez et al. (2021) posit that moving beyond the traditional focus of food skills is necessary to address the demands of consumers navigating complex food environments; it is here where more disparity occurs within the identified literature.

### 2.7 Food literacy in the presence of food insecurity

This subsection moves to consider how food literacy intersects with food insecurity. Questions are raised as to whether a lack of food literacy can be viewed as a cause of food insecurity or whether, conversely, experiences of food insecurity limit practice.

Examination of existing literature has shown that there is little consensus regarding what food literacy consists of beyond practical skills and nutritional knowledge. Some definitions place a singular emphasis on these facets, whilst others extend to include cultural, relational, and systemic dimensions, for example: Cullen et al.(2015), Perry et al. (2017) and Palumbo et al. (2019). These differences underline the contested and multi-layered nature of food literacy as a concept, particularly when viewed through a lens of insecurity and precarity.

There is, however, a potential paradoxical relationship between food insecurity and food literacy: whilst food literacy is cited as a mechanism of resilience to precarity, the extent to which being food insecure hinders the development of food literacy requires investigation.

Minimising food insecurity is dependent upon an adequate level food and resources. Begley et al. (2019), for example, propose that there are numerous determinants that can impact levels of food insecurity, such as insufficient economic and physical resources, diet quality, food sufficiency and food literacy. The authors state that, whilst there has been a significant amount of research into poverty and the ability, or otherwise, to afford the constituents of a healthy diet, disruption to any of the four pillars will result in disequilibrium (Figure 9). Individual food security is achieved in the presence of the four pillars: availability, access, utilisation, and stability. Stability cannot exist in isolation and achievement is dependent upon the presence of all other elements (Lawlis et al., 2019).

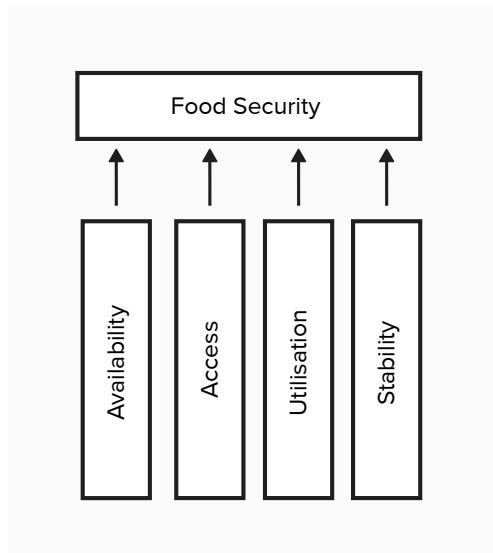


Figure 9: The four pillars of food security (Begley et al., 2019).

Arguably, of the four pillars, only utilisation is person-centred, concerned with individual responsibility and tends to be the primary focus of most food literacy interventions. Advocates suggest that food literacy is the one aspect that can be improved through education and skill development (Knol et al., 2019), whereas the other pillars contributing to food insecurity are largely unmodifiable without systemic change. The utilisation pillar incorporates all aspects involved in the safe transformation of food into household meals, i.e. food literacy, but does assume access, availability, and stability (Figure 9).

Poor dietary quality has been attributed to a deficit of personal knowledge and skills. The combined characteristics of food insecurity in high-income countries, such as overconsumption of high-energy foods and reduced dietary diversity typified by a lack of fruits and vegetables, lead to the common foci of food literacy programmes. Many of these interventions seek to build self-efficacy and skills in cooking and budgeting, justified on the basis that individuals with limited functional knowledge are more likely to purchase ultra-processed foods and have reduced individual creativity in meal prep, etc. (Vidgen and Gallegos, 2014).

There is a lack of consensus across the literature regarding the interconnection of food insecurity and food literacy. Whilst food literacy is conceptualised as a set of food-related skills and knowledge that, if appropriately adopted, empower the individual to make informed and healthy choices, food behaviours may be negatively influenced by a lack of food availability. Terragni et al. (2020) found contrasting results within studies evaluating the impact of food skills on food insecurity; higher food skills positively impacted dietary diversity when supply was available, but no association was noted with food security. Puddlephat et al. (2020) found that whilst previous research concluded that food insecurity is robustly associated with poorer food quality (Bocquier et al., 2015; Davison et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2015; and Leung et al., 2014) it is primarily the cost of food precluding healthy eating, healthy food was valued but was deemed unaffordable, rather than there being any lack of ability around its preparation.

Conversely, financial deprivation and flawed social conditions were found by Palumbo et al. (2019) to pre-empt problematic food literacy skills, suggesting that inadequate food-related knowledge is prevalent among those living in poverty. Furthermore, they proposed that, to effectively mitigate this, policymakers should design and deliver tailored food policies that halt disparities and enhance individual capabilities to make timely and effective food choices. Proposed interventions should extend beyond bridging economic barriers and that they should be aimed at addressing the entrenched patterns of social and cultural factors determining food habits and consumption.

Whilst programmes that promote individual resilience may offer valuable support, their contribution to systemic change, particularly in reducing chronic or long-term dependency on food aid, remains uncertain. Simultaneously, some interventions appear to be directed at specific demographics based on presumed deficits in skills or knowledge, risking the reinforcement of stereotypes rather than addressing structural barriers.

In addition to the discourse around the component skills that contribute to classifying an individual as 'literate', there is debate around the extent to which they are even lacking (Coveney et al., 2012). Drawing on Foucault's work on governmentality, Coveney

suggests the conversations and debates around what and how to cook, and the moral panics in which they are embedded, establish ‘moral pedagogies about what should be considered ‘good’ and ‘bad’ cooking. *“The problematisation of cooking skills is not new and can be seen in several historical developments that have specified particular pedagogies about food and eating”*. (Coveney et al., 2012, p. 622). Where academia has become interested in studying cookery, questions have arisen regarding the exact nature of cooking. Where studies concur that cookery involves the transformation of the state of food, other possibilities arise, such as whether mere assembly or reheating qualifies as cookery and, indeed, what skills in general comprise fluency? Coveney suggests that there is a problematisation in experts’ privileging cooking from scratch as the optimum, especially with respect to nurturing improvements in eating behaviours and, therefore, diet quality.

Seeking to empower individuals through the provision of cooking skills is essentially transferring responsibility within a neoliberal discourse of model and moral citizenship (Wavin, 2011 cited in Coveney, 2012). This questions whether concerns being raised around levels of food literacy are based on the values and judgements of one social stratum being applied to another’s. Lang and Caraher (2001) expand to ask whether if there is a decline in home cooking, does it even matter? The authors propose that, whilst there is a nutritional transition being experienced by the nation as a whole, there is also what they term ‘a culinary transition’ creating a fundamental shift for the whole cultures. The pattern of skills required to get food onto tables has shifted and organisations such as the National Food Alliance and many food writers have made the loss of cooking skills education a rallying cry whilst criticism lays an accusation of ‘mythologising a halcyon era of cooking’ (Lang and Caraher, 2001).

Seminal work was undertaken by Caraher et al. (1999) around the relationship between cooking skills and food choice. Findings suggested a lack of skill contributed to an increased feeling of relative poverty, the inability to prepare and consume a healthy diet and the denial of a ‘passport to health’. However, the relevance of cooking for health should not be overstated. No direct relationships between cooking skills and health status could be drawn, simply that possessing poor food literacy could be a barrier to

widening food choice. These are findings supported by investigation into the relationship between cooking skills and the frequency of consumption of fruits and vegetables by Hartmann et al. (2013). A positive correlation in uptake was found whilst, Burton et al. (2017) found those with the least food skills confidence demonstrated more barriers to healthy eating such as increased impulse purchasing and higher use of convenience foods. Lavelle et al. (2019) found a tentative relationship between income and food or cooking skills; but more significant was age and gender with older females having higher literacy than younger males. McGowan et al. (2016) suggest that greater cooking and food skills may not lead to healthier choices directly, given the myriad of other factors implicated, but cooking skills may help in a reduction in the consumption of saturated fat.

Cross-sectional analysis of time spent cooking in the 2005 UK time use survey (Adams and White, 2015) indicates females generally spend the most time cooking and being of older age, not in employment, lower social class, greater education or living with others is even more positively associated with time engaged in the activity. Few differences were seen across socio-demographic correlates in men. This data suggests that socio-economic differences in time spent cooking may have been overstated as a determinant of socio-economic differences in diet, overweight and obesity. Notably, the authors elected to exclude individuals under 25 years old from the research sample given their many unstable 'socio-economic variables'; this opens a gap in understanding how the impact of economic instability may change findings.

International evidence further suggests that time spent cooking is structured by factors beyond income or 'class position'. Monsivais et al. (2014) found that individuals spending the least time on cooking were working adults who prioritised convenience despite greater time spent cooking being associated with higher diet quality. This indicates both a level of pre-existing literacy and time availability and employment demands, rather than socio economic disadvantage as key constraints on practice. This is further endorsed, more recently, by Berning et al. (2023) who demonstrate that it is older adults who devote the most time to cooking, where there is an adequacy of time but where income levels may be fixed and more susceptible to price fluctuations. Taken

together, these findings suggest that there is a stratified decline in home cooking but it is shaped by age, employment, time scarcity and capacity rather than simply a lack of finances.

Significantly, in a major study Huisken et al. (2016) found that adults experiencing food poverty did not differ from others with regards to their cooking skills. Hernandez et al. (2021) state that moving beyond the traditional focus of food skills is necessary to address the demands of consumers navigating complex food environments.

Considering food literacy interventions beyond the individual and drawing on social marketing which is focussed on changing attitudes, values, and behaviours for the benefit of society (Gordon, 2013), it is possible, and necessary, to identify and segment the various stakeholders with a vested interest in their promotion. Social Marketing's dangerous stream analogy (French, 2014) depicts a fast-flowing stream in which many people downstream are drowning; the question is around where limited resources should be deployed? Retrieving, and reviving from downstream or upstream, implementing preventative measures that stop people falling in at all? Upstream priority is concerned with influencing policy makers who will introduce structural changes to the benefit of society, midstream activity in a social marketing campaign tends towards strategy implementation. Effective midstream activities can help people cope with and improve their ability to deal with poor social conditions and their community wellbeing (French, 2014) Arguably, food literacy interventions typify midstream activity as opposed to direct food aid fulfilling the role of downstream 'rescuer'. However, post democratic theory suggests we are in an environment where control is in the hands of a socio-economic elite (Dibb and Carrigan, 2013). Involving 'outsiders' to promote causes is often effective at raising public awareness but, can also be perceived as insincere and purely for the self-interest of those promoting. In this context, the advocate can be perceived as part of the elite and therefore not working in the interest of the beneficiary at all (Brockington and Henson, 2014). Whilst health improvement is central to the values of those working within the realm of policy and public health it is often not held in the same regard within the wider population.

Where behaviour is defined as an individuals' action or inaction, a raising of public awareness, attitudes or intention is an insufficient outcome. Success is measured by tangible change and adoption of the desired response (Lee et al., 2021). Does the way in which programmes promoting food literacy are designed and delivered, including the extent to which *all* stakeholders are engaged in the process, impact their effectiveness?

Questions arise around the level of importance placed on the various drivers of food insecurity and by whom, and the subsequent ability to demonstrate the component factors of food literacy. Butcher et al. (2018) found consensus, when investigating the perceptions of various beneficiary groups, that limited income was the primary driver of food insecurity. However, government, academia, and the not-for-profit sectors placed higher importance on the food utilisation pillar; limited food literacy as a food security marker was considered a greater driver for stakeholders than those in at risk groups, who did not largely view their skills as a barrier to obtaining healthy food. Begley et al. (2019) suggest that improving aspects of food insecurity, such as improved knowledge and skills, may assist in maximising income but only to a point; education cannot change the cost of food or resolve other economically driven causes. Thomas et al. (2019) state that eating patterns have been implicated in the development of non-communicable diseases, themselves amongst the leading causes of death and disability globally however, efforts to promote healthy eating have often focussed on food preparation skills or nutrition knowledge in isolation but these efforts may achieve limited population level gains because they do not address the myriad of socio-ecological factors that shape dietary intake.

## **2.8 An overview of current food literacy interventions**

For the purposes of this research, extended food aid interventions are defined as programmes, projects and services which extend beyond the provision of emergency food aid. Where these may be delivered by local level voluntary or community settings there is often involvement from local authority, larger third

sector, or commercial stakeholders with individual and shared agenda. Cookery classes and demonstrations are a frequent component of many interventions. Evaluation of interventions related to food literacy has tended to focus on the functional and declarative knowledge of skills and nutrition. However, both the formal and informal wraparound support given by providers is often regarded as their key, if not primary, contribution.

The upswing in third sector response in food aid provision evidences the devolution of responsibility to the third sector. A key question arises as to the extent to which local communities can, and should, respond to problems over longer term strategic protectionist policies being implemented by the state. Similarly, critics suggest that the food charity industry has become a key part of the food aid economy, providing a sticking plaster on the problem, yet having its own agendas for survival. For example, referring to the ‘hunger industrial complex’ Fisher, in an interview with Brownell (2020), suggests that actors within the food aid system perpetuate the problem of hunger for institutional stability; the focus is on managing hunger, not ending it. Whilst Ronson and Caraher (2016) describe food bank models as ‘successful failures’, immediate need is addressed but long-term structural inequalities fail to be addressed. The living conditions created for their beneficiaries are preferable to what may be if they were absent, but they ultimately remain focussed on the downstream (Lakhani and Uteova, 2021).

Within the home, the dietary gatekeeper plays a key role in relation to food consumption (Reid et al., 2015). It is this gatekeeper who holds the most responsibility for food purchases and preparing the family meals, they influence what the family considers to be nutritious and appropriate to eat. Arguably, for an achievable and timely impact, any interventions delivered should target those who hold the gatekeeper role. For example, Kelly et al. (2015) indicate that policy makers have begun to recognise that there is an urgent need to connect with

gatekeepers because of their influence over the everyday practicalities of eating. Wijayarathne et al. (2018) propose that gatekeepers with a higher level of food literacy have greater knowledge about nutrition, increased confidence in their ability to cook, and better food acquisition and transformation practices; it is these capabilities that augment a sense of control or empowerment.

## **2.9 Systematic review of cookery intervention efficacy**

It was demonstrated in Chapter 1 that a narrative exists suggesting that expanding the cooking and budgeting skills of those accessing services may be a solution to a reliance on food aid. To identify existing research relating to the efficacy of adult education programmes at addressing experiences of poverty and food insecurity a systematic review (Appendix D) of literature from 2000 onwards was undertaken. To identify relevant literature, a PRISMA process (Appendices B) was followed with concepts such as cookery, cookery classes, intervention and effectiveness used as search terms (Appendix C). The Scopus and PubMed databases were utilised. Additional literature was identified using Google Scholar and by reviewing relevant papers cited within the results of the search process.

The selection criteria for studies included the dissemination of information targeting an improvement in the identified components of food literacy, i.e., planning, shopping, cooking, and nutritional knowledge, towards adults, but were not limited to the United Kingdom. Whilst not explicitly addressing the drivers and impacts of food insecurity, the characteristics of the research samples and the delivery mechanisms through which programme aims and objectives were achieved were used to provide insights into future research exploring the interplay between food insecurity and food literacy, alongside the potential efficacy of such interventions.

12 articles were identified (Appendix C), of which one (Garcia et al., 2016) was a systematic review of practical cookery interventions. In general, there was a lack of emphatic support for how effective programmes may be overall. For example, Garcia et

al. (2017) found an increase in motivation was linked to improved cookery skills, but this was not reflected in an increase in actual eating patterns; Hutchinson et al. (2016) noted that although increased levels of confidence were observed, multivariate regression analysis revealed no associations between nutrition outcomes and deprivation, nor between the ethnicity of various groups and nutrition outcomes. Orr and McCamley (2017) reported increased awareness within the study population within the qualitative data which was not reflected in the quantitative analysis; this could be interpreted as having little influence over actual behaviour change. Begley et al. (2019) do suggest that programmes may be best suited for certain groups. Those with the lowest starting levels of food literacy for example. However programmes in general appear to be attracting those for whom food and cookery skills are a pre-existing interest rather than a pressing need. West et al. (2020) indicate that if sustained behaviour change is to be achieved there is a need for contextual circumstances at an individual course level to be considered. This is at odds with the drive for consistency and standardised curricula. Similarly, Garcia et al. (2021) state that the heterogeneity in cooking attitudes and behaviours across groups is highly complex and highly dependent upon individual, social, cultural, and geographical contexts. There was a significant level of participant attrition which may indicate a disconnect between what is expected and needed and what is offered. Alternatively, greater consideration of the specific needs of target audiences may be required. Garcia et al. (2016), within a systematic literature review, ultimately found that whilst some positive impacts were reported often these were open to a high degree of bias and the overall lack of consistency in study design, delivery, and evaluation made clear conclusions on efficacy difficult to achieve.

## **2.10 Establishing the research gap**

Moving beyond practical cookery skills, the most successful public health programmes have been established where an understanding of the health behaviours and the context in which they exist is considered (Mehtala et al.,2014). The social ecological model of health promotion emphasises that focus should not rest purely on intrapersonal factors, but also on the multiple-level factors that influence the specific behaviour in question, particularly the interactions between individuals and the social, physical, and policy

environments. As has been shown within this literature review, there is a significant body of existing research exploring political, societal, and individual factors around poverty, as well as much material examining the relationships between diet and health; however, there is a paucity of studies exploring how food insecurity and its wider effects interlink with the ability to demonstrate food literacy. Perhaps more importantly, the extent to which there is a consensus across all stakeholder groups of a need, both in the literal sense of improving resilience, but also in the figurative sense of it being wanted or desired by all. Similarly, the literature exploring the effectiveness of interventions promoting uptake and improvement of the foundational components of food literacy has shown inconclusivity and inconsistency in how efficacy is measured. As the definitions and constituent components of food literacy have evolved to encompass more than skills and knowledge, the impact of experiences of food insecurity on the less tangible elements of food literacy also requires investigation. No less important is gaining an increased understanding of the role of the intervention beyond that of emergency food aid provision.

## Chapter 3 – Theoretical Foundations

### 3.0 Introduction to chapter

The aim of this chapter is to provide outlines of the theoretical grounding of this research. Firstly, through exploration of various theories of poverty including individual, structural and socio-economic perspectives and how these align in the UK's neoliberal environment. Particular attention is paid to how these frameworks shape understandings of poverty and exclusion, and how they help to situate food insecurity as a symptom of broader socio-economic processes.

### 3.1 Theories on the causes of poverty

This research is being undertaken within the context of fifteen years of neoliberal government policy. Understanding why people are poor and how poverty should be addressed reflects the broader political-economic dynamics and relations that prevail at a particular historical moment (Feldman, 2019). Neoliberalism has shaped and structured poverty in the United Kingdom and beyond; in principle, it positively conceives of the poor as free agents who can escape poverty via the market (Katz, 2013) and therefore rejects the pathological notion of poverty and sees the poor as equal to the rest of society. However, under neoliberalism, the economic logic of the market, and how it is contributed to, is extended to ever growing domains of human life that were previously thought of as non-market. (Brown, 2015; Garrett, 2013; Schram, 2015 cited in Feldman, 2019).

The impact of neoliberalism on those experiencing poverty can be expressed in several interrelated features, including the restructuring of the welfare state, growing precarity, and inequality. Neoliberalism rejects an equality of outcomes but is open to an equality of opportunity. Where there is an embracing of laissez-faire and promotion of the market as an ideal to be championed in all spheres of life, in practice it offers harsh treatment for those at the bottom of the socio-economic order who do not, or cannot, meet the threshold for being successful market actors; in this sense neoliberalism can be

interpreted as constructing the poor. Neoliberal thinkers, such as Hayek and Friedman, are unconcerned with inequality; they suggest that inequality within societies is necessary for prosperity, but there is no agreement on the level (Mirowski, 2014 cited in Feldman, 2019). Furthermore, the provision of support can be seen as conflicting with the market approach by suppressing the impetus to contribute. The claim that generous social policies incentivise poverty-increasing behaviour has been central to behavioural theories for some time (Brady, 2019). Arguably, there has been demonstrable ambivalence by UK governments towards the acknowledgement of poverty with an absence of a recognised definition or measure of poverty across every life stage. For example, the Conservative party manifesto (2015) signalled the root causes of poverty as entrenched worklessness, family breakdown, problem debt and drug and alcohol dependency arguably placing culpability with the individual.

At the time of writing in September 2025, a decade later and with a new government in place for a year, the winning manifesto pledge to deliver ‘change’ is being questioned by actors in the anti-poverty sector. High-profile commitments to reverse the impacts of former policies, such as the child poverty strategy, are delayed and revisions to the Welfare Bill threaten to place larger swathes of the population in, or at risk of, poverty (Griss, 2025).

This research aims to assess the relationships between food insecurity and food literacy from the standpoint of food insecurity being a symptom of poverty and food literacy potentially supporting with some of the associated effects. With an improved understanding of how the two concepts interact it is proposed that more effective policies and interventions can be developed. The view of poverty that we ultimately embrace will have a direct bearing on the public policies that we pursue (Schiller, 1989 cited in Bradshaw, 2007). Brady (2019) proposes a definition of poverty as simply ‘a shortage of resources relative to needs’ but finds the need to focus on context and diminishing support for generic theories of poverty amongst most experts. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2009) define poverty as “a person’s resources (mainly their material resources) as not sufficient to meet minimum needs (including social participation)” (Davies and Sanchez-Martinez, 2014). The former definition distils the

phenomenon of poverty into something tangible whilst acknowledging the shortcomings of such an approach; the latter attaches significance to the effects as much as the cause and captures both the absolute and relative characteristics of poverty.

There are several theories around the causes of poverty; most tend towards two major schools of thought: Individualistic, where poverty results from the deficiencies of individuals, such as biogenic, human capital or cultural theory; secondly, structural theories where macro level factors such as demographic vulnerabilities, labour market opportunities or resources distribution can determine the susceptibility to poverty (Davis and Sanchez-Martinez, 2014). Alternative theories augment with the suggestion that it is political regulations and decisions that determine how economic resources are distributed (Beacom et al., 2021). For example, Marxian theorists argue that social and political factors, such as class division, have the greatest impact on poverty, and that, overall, economic growth may not provide sufficient mitigation.

Individual factors are rooted in the belief that the free-market system provides opportunity for all. Therefore, individuals are responsible for working hard in order to provide for themselves. Classical behavioural theories, and within them the subculture of poverty theory, (Davis and Sanchez-Martinez, 2014) are used to explain why food poverty occurs from an individualist perspective; drawing from the theory of exchange in the marketplace that reward (i.e., wages) is correlated to working hard and that poverty is somehow a result of inefficiency or poor choices; various approaches exist, such as behavioural or decision-based theory where those in deprivation make choices to effectively 'self-select' into their condition. For instance, choosing not to work or pursue education could be considered increasing susceptibility to poverty.

Structural theories as defined by Brady (2019) focus on how the macro and meso demographic and economic factors can influence poverty status. Demographic elements include neighbourhood disadvantage, age and gender composition and urbanization. Economic and contextual elements include economic growth and development, changes in markets, industrialisation, and fluctuating demand for skills. Neo Classical theory posits that poverty is the result of a failure in the market or economy

beyond the individual's control; barriers to education, reduced opportunities for marginalised groups, poor health and advancing age all reduce the ability to find work or join the workforce and therefore increase the likelihood of food poverty. (Blank, 2003; Reinstadler and Ray, 2010 cited in Beacom et al., 2021).

Political factors are cited by Beacom (2021) as contributing to or influencing poverty. Political regulations and laws determine how economic resources are distributed and government departments implement policies which can be viewed as contributing to poverty. Additionally, in the shadow of the localism act, there is a key question around the extent to which local communities can and should be responding to problems or whether the longer term needs national government to be accountable for protection and support. The Localism Act (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011) local claimed that greater freedom and flexibilities for local government were vital for achieving the shift in power the government wanted to see. The simultaneous promotion of the voluntary and community sector was extolled as a key feature in backfilling the gaps left by the budget constraints faced by local authorities with austerity measures still present:

*“Government alone does not make great places to live, people do. People who look out for their neighbours, who take pride in their street and get involved.... voluntary and community groups often find that their potential is neglected when, in fact, they carry some of the most innovative and effective work in public services and we should be encouraging them to get more involved”*

(Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011 P8).

### **3.2 Social exclusion**

A critique levelled at models of poverty, regardless of cause and whether it is absolute or relative, is that they fail to consider the impacts and effects of the absence of resources (Jehoel- Gijbers and Vroorman, 2007). Individuals, families, and groups can be said to be in poverty when...their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities (Townsend, 1979, cited in Levitas, 2000). Where the

various models of poverty discussed above offer understanding of the causes, they may be considered necessary but not sufficient to understand the nuanced impacts of UK food insecurity.

Social exclusion, with roots in French republicanism, is conceived as not only an economic or political phenomenon but as a deficiency of solidarity or a break in the social fabric (Silver, 1994). Social Exclusion is considered a part of the main paradigms of poverty theory, and in particular political-economic theory, but differs because of the elements drawn from other social sciences. (Davis and Sanchez-Martinez, 2014).

### 3.2.1 Definitions of social exclusion

Table 2: Definitions of Social Exclusion (Cited in Levitas, 2007).

	Source	Definition
1	SEU (1997)	"... A shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown."
2	DSS (1999)	"Social Exclusion occurs where different factors combine to trap individuals and areas in a spiral of disadvantage"
3	Scottish Executive	Social Exclusion is a process, which causes individuals or groups, who are geographically resident in a society, not to participate in normal activities of citizens in that society"
4	NPI, Howarth et al. (1998)	"The notion of poverty that has guided the development of this report is where people lack many of the opportunities that are available to the average citizen...This broad concept of poverty coincides with the emerging concept of social exclusion"
5	ESRC, (2004)	"The processes by which individuals and their communities become polarised, socially differentiated and unequal."
6	Gordon et al. (2003)	A lack or denial of access to the kinds of social relations, social customs, and activities in which the great majority of people on British society engage. In current usage, social exclusion is often regarded as a 'process' rather than a 'state' and this helps in being constructively precise in deciding its relationship to poverty."
7	Walker and Walker (1997)	"The dynamic process of being shut out from any of the social, economic, political, and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society"
8	Burchardt et al. (2002)	An individual is socially excluded if (a) he or she is geographically resident in a society but (b) for reasons beyond his or her control,

		he or she cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society, and (c) he or she would like to participate
9	Room (1995)	“Inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power.”
10	Duffy (1995)	“Social Exclusion is a broader concept than poverty, encompassing not only low material means but the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life and, in some characterisations, alienation and distance from mainstream society”
11	EU Employment and Social Affairs Directorate	(Social Inclusion) “The development of capacity and opportunity to play a full role, not only in economic terms, but also in social, psychological and political terms.”
12	Estivill (2003)	“An accumulation of confluent processes with successive ruptures arising from the heart of the economy, politics, and society, which gradually distances and places persons, groups, communities, and territories in a position of inferiority in relation to centres of power, resources and prevailing values.”

Where the mainstream theories of poverty are prone to a focus on the lack of material resources, social exclusion theory lends itself to the study of the structural characteristics of society and the situations of certain groups including their socially defined characteristics such as ethnicity, age or disability which can generate and characterise exclusion. As demonstrated by the definitions in Table 2, Social Exclusion is a broader concept than poverty, encompassing not only low material means but the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political, and cultural life and, in some characterisations, alienation and distance from mainstream society (Duffy, 1995 cited in Muddiman, 2000). In this thesis, social exclusion is used alongside theories of poverty where it foregrounds socio-cultural effects as well as causes. Social Exclusion is multi-causal, relational, and it includes the less tangible aspects associated with poverty, such as the loss of status, power, self-esteem, and expectations (Oppenheim, 1998, cited in Levitas, 2000). Comparisons between poverty and social exclusion (Table 3) are drawn by Jehoel Gijssbers and Vroorman (2007):

*Table 3: Distinctions between Poverty and Social Exclusion (Jehoel-Gijssbers and Vroorman, 2007).*

Poverty	Social Exclusion
<p><b>Static Condition</b></p> <p>Relates to a given income situation or standard consumption pattern at a certain moment.</p>	<p><b>Dynamic Process</b></p> <p>Has to do with the process through which people become excluded.</p>
<p><b>Absolute Concept</b></p> <p>May be conceived as an absolute lack e.g., persons who do not attain the income level required to fulfil basic needs.</p>	<p><b>Relative Concept</b></p> <p>There is no such absolute demarcation point. It can only be assessed in a relative way by comparing a person's circumstances vis-a-vis others in the same socio-historical context.</p>
<p><b>Uni-Dimensional Disadvantage</b></p> <p>Relates to a single dimension, a shortage of financial or material resources, or income deprivation.</p>	<p><b>Multi-Dimensional Disadvantage</b></p> <p>Involves deficiencies in several dimensions, which are associated with full citizenship: Paid work and income, education, housing, health care, legal assistance, accessibility of public provisions.</p>
<p><b>Distributional Focus (Material)</b></p> <p>Relates to the distribution of economic aspects of disadvantage in income or consumption.</p>	<p><b>Relational Focus (Non- Material)</b></p> <p>Also concerns relational and socio-cultural aspects, such as solidarity, social bonds, participation and integration, engagement, discrimination, and the norms of social citizenship (reciprocity, mutual obligation etc)</p>
<p><b>Endogenous Focus</b></p> <p>Analysed at the individual or household level. Agency* lies mainly in the characteristics of the disadvantaged themselves.</p> <p>*Agency – the individual or collective actors that bring about shortages</p>	<p><b>Exogenous Focus</b></p> <p>Derives from a lack of social/ communal resources e.g. neighbourhood, social network, social security agencies, social infrastructure. The excluded may have little or no control over exogenous factors</p>

### **3.2.2 Models and approaches to social exclusion**

The shift from income poverty to social exclusion entails a broadening of focus on three fronts (Room, 1995, cited in Hick, 2012) and evolves to consider multi-dimensional disadvantage, dynamic processes, and local community. Social Exclusion, as with income poverty, can be considered an outcome or 'finite state'. Alternatively, social exclusion is considered a process, it is the contributory risk factors that are of interest irrespective of whether the related outcomes occur. Considering social exclusion as a process, rather than a finite state, is especially important when seeking appropriate mitigating measures to be implemented. For example, Townsend (cited in Levitas, 2000) warns that thinking in terms of 'excluded and included' can be a way of allowing a recognition of manifest social deprivation to coexist with an uncritical acceptance of capitalism and its impacts.

Arguably, the drivers of social exclusion should be considered multiple and cumulative. The 'proper' way to conduct analysis is to consider the actions of various agents which may increase the risk of poverty and social exclusion (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman, 2007). This could include actions or negligence on the part of the affected person themselves or of other individual or corporate actors. For example, fellow citizens may cause exclusion by morally rejecting people who are different. Intermediate organisations that are charged with carrying out government policy in social security, health or welfare may also be agents of poverty and social exclusion through unclear goal definitions. National governments may be regarded as actors if their policies enhance the risk of poverty or social exclusion, or the measures implemented to combat these phenomena may be ineffective (Schuyt and Voorham, 2000, cited in Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman, 2007).

It is suggested that there are three approaches to social exclusion: a redistributive discourse, a social integration discourse, and a moral underclass discourse (Levitas, 2000). The redistributive discourse is derived from social policy and sees exclusion as a consequence of poverty. Within this framework social exclusion is understood to mean

something more complex than is colloquially understood by poverty in that it is dynamic, processual, multidimensional, and relational. There is space for understanding that discriminatory and exclusionary practices may be causes of poverty but fundamentally, poverty remains at the core.

Within the social integration discourse paid work is represented as the primary or sole legitimate means of integrating individuals of working age into society. However, unlike the redistributive model, there is little consideration of the value of unpaid work or how those in low paid work may still find themselves excluded. Finally, the moral underclass discourse emphasises the moral and cultural causes of poverty. There is a central concern with the 'moral hazard of dependency' and workless households rather than individual labour market attachments.

The social integration and moral discourses offer synergies with Anglo-American liberalism where exclusion is considered a consequence of specialisation. Specialisation is social differentiation, the economic division of labour and the separation of spheres or groups. Social exclusion results from an inadequate separation of social spheres from the application of rules deemed inappropriate to said sphere or from barriers to free movement and exchange between spheres. Haan (1998) states that individual freedom of choice, based on diverse personal values and psychological motives for engaging in social relations, should give rise to cross-cutting group affiliations and loyalties contributing to the integration of society. However, the monopoly paradigm of social exclusion, popular in Europe and the UK, suggests that exclusion is a consequence of the formation of group monopoly and draws heavily from Weber, and to a lesser extent Marx. The social order is coercive and imposed through a set of hierarchical power relations. Exclusion arises from the interplay of class, status and political power and serves the needs of the included. Social closure is achieved when institutions and cultural distinctions not only create boundaries that keep others out but are also used to perpetuate inequality.

This research utilises the framework proposed by Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman (2007) which draws upon the French and Anglo-American schools of social exclusion theory.

Figure 10 shows the characteristics of social exclusion as identified by the authors which, whilst representing a finite state or result of being excluded, are arguably also preventative factors when adequately addressed. Of particular relevance is the classification of economic/ structural and socio- cultural dimensions which are arguably reflective of the components of extended definitions of food literacy. In line with the analytical focus outlined in Chapter 1, this framework enables an examination of how material deprivation and, significantly, social exclusion shape the conditions under which food literacy is acquired and enacted, rather than assuming food literacy as a primary determinant in the reduction of food insecurity.

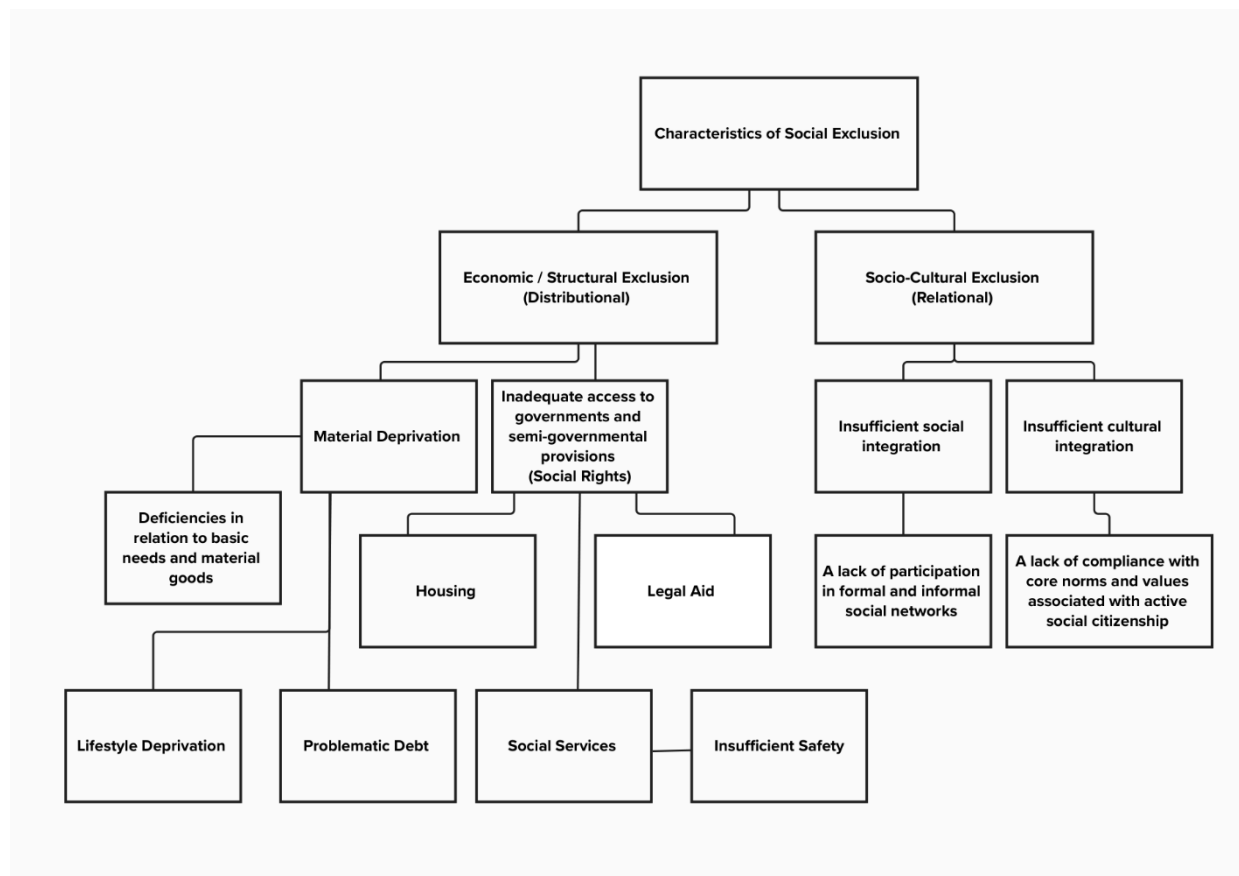


Figure 10: The characteristics of social exclusion (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman, 2007).

Of note are the definitions and criteria for social-cultural exclusion. The social integration dimension includes societal participation, defined as having paid or unpaid work, informal social participation, such as contact with friends and family, as well as

organised social participation such as membership of associations or church attendance. Cultural integration is focussed on dominant values and norms; these are considered to be imperative therefore, operationally, this dimension could be referred to as 'normative integration'. Whilst there is an undisputed norm of abiding by the law, which is agreed at a macro level and is a requirement of every citizen, it is the imperative social norms that potentially resonate. Imperative social norms do not generally lead to punishment but may have negative social sanctions if they are violated. The authors suggest examples may include the equal; treatment of men and women, behaving in line with the work ethic and active involvement in society; where extended definitions of food literacy incorporate social and cultural components there is a need for exploration of how experiences of food insecurity and, potentially, accessing services and interventions interact or could be perceived as rendering the individual subject to social sanctions.

Key features of social exclusion identified by Atkinson and Hills (1998) which highlight that exclusion is the result of certain processes including relativity, agency, and dynamics. Relativity considers the notion that exclusion can only be judged by comparing the circumstances of individuals, groups, or communities relative to others in a given place or time. Agency is the idea that people are excluded by the acts of some agents and dynamics are the characteristics of exclusion and its adverse effects which may only become apparent over time as an accumulated response. Donnison (1998) proposes that this shifts the focus towards who is excluded, by whom, in what ways, and from what? Understanding these factors can then contribute to better informed policy decision making (Saunders, 2003).

Where criticism levelled at the concept of social exclusion suggests that it offers little more than Townsend's (1979) definition of poverty, and being excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities, its proponents suggest that the relational processes of social exclusion may include the role of individual agency, action and capability in combatting or adding to inequalities (Silver, 1994; Sen, 2000 cited in Arthurson and Jacobs, 2004). *"The question of the extent to which individuals who live in poverty are culpable for their predicament and the degree to which structural factors*

*affect individual capacity is contested in all areas of social exclusion analysis. Social Exclusion is seen as one of the concepts that bridge the divide between agency and structuralist interpretations by emphasising the ways in which individual action shapes and in turn is shaped by social processes” (Arthurson and Jacobs, 2004 p30).*

### **3.3 Othering, dignity, and relational-symbolic aspects of poverty**

Despite honourable intent, there may be a disconnect between the perceptions of both the need and ‘solution’ offered by various stakeholder groups (Atkinson and Hills, 1998; Haan, 1998). Exploitation, marginalisation, and powerlessness are terms that refer to relations of power and oppression created by social divisions of labour; in effect, who works for whom, who does not work, and how the content of work (or not) defines one’s institutional position relative to others. People’s lives are potentially delimited by this exploitation, marginalisation, and powerlessness (Young, 2000).

Structural and institutional relations are not only restricted to the resources that people have access to, but also the concrete opportunities they do or do not have to exercise and develop their capacities. In essence, who benefits from whom and who is dispensable.—*“The dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the other” (Young, 2000, p. 54).*

This invisibility manifests when a dominant group fails to recognise a perspective embodied within cultural expressions as a perspective. For example, those within the subordinate group may find themselves defined from the outside, positioned, and placed by a network of dominant meanings they experience as arising from elsewhere, from those with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them. There is a distinction between the ‘unacceptable hardship’ that constitutes poverty’s material core and poverty’s ‘relational-symbolic’ aspects (Lister, 2000). Humiliation, disrespect, shame and stigma, assault on dignity, self-esteem, denial of human rights, diminished citizenship, lack of voice, powerlessness, and othering are all identified as these relational- symbolic aspects of poverty.

Within the context of poverty, othering is the process through which the poor are condemned by the 'non-poor' and therefore uphold and reinforce social stratifications (Power, 2022). However, othering is increasingly a process through which the poor themselves disparage and demarcate themselves from 'others' living in poverty in order to distance themselves from the stigma of their own poverty. Caraher and Dowler (2014) suggest that political responses to rising levels of destitution have largely characterised individuals as responsible for their own poverty; in particular, poor financial management and faulty behavioural practices are cited. The shift from a welfare state to individual responsibility (Kisby, 2010, cited in Power, 2022) has denigrated notions of dependency, and the extolling of the virtues of active citizenship has intensified the stigma and shame of poverty. The demarcation process of othering may be a protective response to poverty induced shame, but the effect is to fragment social bonds and undermine social solidarity more broadly which compounds the atomisation of modern society (Chase and Walker, 2012).

Dignity comes not from being fed, but from being able to feed oneself (Bernaschi et al., 2023). Food insecurity not only concerns the lack of access to an amount of food sufficient for one's survival, but it also involves a deprivation in terms of autonomy and control over one's state of food security which has significant social effects. Where food literacy is promoted as a vehicle for individual and community resilience, further exploration is required around how experiences of food insecurity interact with the goal of this being achieved and, in particular, where synergies or differences may exist around the barriers, enablers and impact for those affected.

### **3.4 Summary**

This chapter has set out the theoretical foundations underpinning this research and draws primarily upon theories of poverty and social exclusion to frame the analysis of food insecurity, food literacy, and associated interventions within the United Kingdom. In doing so, it has established that food insecurity is fundamentally rooted in material deprivation, which includes insufficient income, inadequate access to food, and

constrained resources. These material conditions are not incidental but constitute the structural basis on which food insecurity arises and persists. Without addressing these material realities, food insecurity cannot be alleviated.

At the same time, this chapter has also demonstrated how a singular focus on material deprivation does not fully capture how food insecurity is experienced, negotiated, and responded to in everyday life. Social Exclusion provides an extended analytical lens through which *the consequences of poverty* can be examined. In doing so, the relational, social and cultural effects of deprivation can be more thoroughly examined. For example, processes of exclusion shape how individuals participate in food-related practices, how dignity and agency are maintained or diminished, and how support is accessed and experienced.

It is notable that poverty and social exclusion are not positioned as competing frameworks but as interconnected ones. Material deprivation creates the conditions through which exclusion is produced, whilst exclusion shapes the way in which poverty is experienced, interpreted, and navigated. In the case of food insecurity, this relationship is particularly salient as food potentially extends beyond a material necessity to be a deeply social and emotional symbol of belonging. Exclusion from socially acceptable food practices, choice, and autonomy represents an impact that cannot be fully understood by material measures alone.

The adoption of social exclusion as the primary theoretical foundations does not negate the importance of poverty studies but builds upon them. This extended lens enables the research to explore the qualitative dimensions of food insecurity which is particularly relevant to the study's focus upon food literacy and associated interventions are inextricably linked to social and structural conditions. Similarly, where this research is exploratory, there is no intention to measure but rather to deepen understanding of how material deprivation manifests within everyday experiences of food insecurity. Also, how these everyday experiences shape the effectiveness and limitations of interventions purported to be of support. This is more adequately achieved by foregrounding social exclusion given its focus upon the impacts and effects of deprivation.

## Chapter 4 – Methods and Methodology

### 4.0 Introduction to chapter

Chapter 2 identified a significant amount of literature exploring the concept of food literacy albeit with a divergence of opinion around the extended components beyond demonstrable skills and knowledge. The literature review also explored studies defining what it is to be food insecure in 21<sup>st</sup> century UK. As discussed, a narrative exists that the benefits of increased food literacy extend to mitigating food insecurity. Findings from a systematic literature review of food education interventions (Appendix D), delivered in the UK and globally, showed inconclusivity about the effectiveness of such programmes. Often inadequate proxies were used as a measure of success, such as uptake of new foods or demonstration of a new skill, and there was a fundamental absence of any long-term impact assessment once interventions were completed. Importantly, this review also revealed a dearth of purely qualitative studies meaning that the in-depth experiences and context related to the phenomena and those experiencing them had not been fully explored. This leads to the research questions for this thesis:

**Q1 – How does the incidence of food insecurity impact food literacy in the case of the UK?**

**Q2 – How do UK extended food aid interventions support food literacy in the context of food insecurity and what are the associated challenges?**

The decision to utilise a qualitative methodology located within the social constructivist paradigm was made for its applicability when considering the theoretical foundations within which this research is situated, as discussed in Chapter 3. Tehrani et al. (2015) define qualitative research as the systematic inquiry into social phenomena in natural settings. A non-exhaustive list of the phenomena that qualitative research is of particular usefulness for includes how people experience aspects of their lives, how individuals and groups behave, how organisations function and how interactions shape

relationships. The qualitative researcher examines why events occur, what happens, and the meaning attached to those events by those who experience them. The aim of this study is to capture insight from the experiences and interpretations from stakeholders and beneficiaries of services beyond fundamental food aid to achieve a rich, thick description, a qualitative approach offered a natural fit. The Qualitative Research Consultants Association (QRCA, 2023) propose that qualitative research offers several benefits over its quantitative counterpart, in particular where understanding from perspectives beyond those of the researcher are needed ahead of larger scale enquiry. The development of parameters, such as relevant questions and range of responses, are aided by this approach. Similarly, the opportunity to observe, record and interpret non-verbal communication can be valuable both during the research process and in subsequent analysis.

This chapter explains and justifies the research design and methodology, provides details of participant recruitment, data collection, and the strategies used to ensure rigour, quality, and trustworthiness in the research process. Ethical considerations will be shown. Finally, an explanation of the data analysis techniques used following fieldwork and to elicit findings will be given.

#### **4.1 Justification for a social constructivist position**

The combination of the epistemological stance of the researcher and the research question(s) fundamentally informs the choice of practical research methods to be used (Bowling, 2008). Patel (2023) suggests that the position of the researcher sits on a continuum and may exist between paradigms. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2013) state that methods exist to service research questions that advance our understanding of the social world or some aspect of it. Subsequently, this research was positioned within the social constructivist and pragmatic paradigms.

Social constructivism is born of the assumption that reality is subjective, multiple, and socially constructed. We can only understand reality through experiences which may

differ from person to person. Those persons' realities are shaped by their own historical or social perspective (MacKinnon et al., 2014). Where research into social justice tends to exist in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environments, the pragmatic ontological characteristics of constant renegotiation, debate, and interpretation in unpredictable situations offer synergies. However, the research question of exploration, rather than seeking understanding of causation or effect, misaligns with the underlying pragmatic aims of change and problem solving. The constructivist goal of interpreting reality (Fig 11) offers a better template into which this specific inquiry can fit (Creswell, 2009; Stake, 2010).

The key tenets of pragmatism are that it rejects traditional dualisms and favours more moderate and common-sense philosophical dualisms based on how well they work in solving the problems under investigation. Pragmatism views knowledge and meaning as being constructed from real world experience, views truth as tentative, and reality as changing over a time. Significantly, given the context of this research, pragmatism advocates human rights and individual freedom; any enquiry should bring relief and benefit to the condition of man, pragmatism recognises human enquiry as comparable to scientific or experimental enquiry, and it endorses theories that inform practice. However, it is essential to acknowledge that pragmatic enquiry will not lead to certainty because, in principle, nothing is certain (University of Nottingham, 2025).

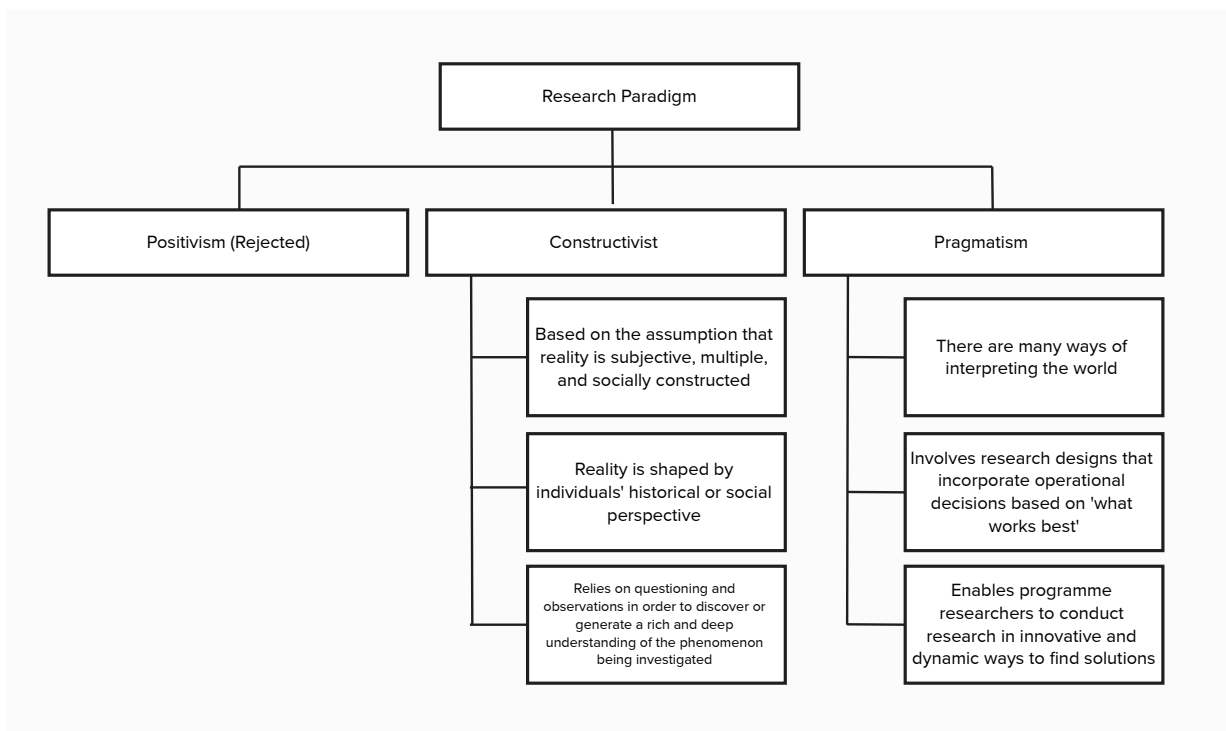


Figure 11: Characteristics of constructivist and pragmatic research paradigms (Creswell, 2009; Stake, 2010).

## 4.2 Choice of methodology

There are many research methodologies that adopt or are based upon constructivist and pragmatic research philosophies. As discussed, this research will be carried out within macro, meso, and microenvironments experiencing a high incidence of unpredictability which therefore legitimises the decision to favour pragmatic methodologies. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2013) propose that methods exist in order to service research questions that advance our understanding of the social world or some aspect of it.

Pragmatic methodologies include but are not limited to: Mixed methods, Design based research, Action research, Q- methodology and generic qualitative enquiry (Patel, 2023; University of Nottingham, 2023). The attributes and usage for each methodology is shown in Table 4 with an assessment of applicability within the context of this research; the chosen methodology for this research is highlighted.

Table 4: Attributes of qualitative methodologies and justification for their use (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

	Attributes and usage	Application
Mixed Methods	<p>Enables the collection, analysis, and integration of data from quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study.</p> <p>Offers a suitable approach when different aspects of an investigation are best addressed by different approaches.</p> <p>Can help deepen an understanding of quantitative findings or support generalisability of qualitative findings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unnecessary within the bounds of this research</li> <li>• This research is an exploration and not seeking causal relationships</li> </ul>
Design-Based Research	<p>Combines empirical research with design-based theories</p> <p>Formed by initial evaluation of a problem that occurs in a particular context.</p> <p>Assessment occurs throughout the design and implementation phases</p> <p>Team based including collaboration between researchers, professionals, designers, managers etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The probability of non-returns is a key challenge in short term projects</li> <li>• The collaborative process is outside the scope of PhD research</li> </ul>
Action Research	<p>A method of systematically examining behaviour to improve practice.</p> <p>Bridges research and practice, allowing those who live the issue to be the main participant in systematically solving the issue</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The focus on a single setting is inappropriate for this research.</li> <li>• The timescales required may be prohibitively long for the scope of PhD research</li> </ul>
Q-Methodology	<p>Represents an approach that has characteristics of both</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Useful in generating hypotheses, the fact that it uses</li> </ul>

	<p>qualitative and quantitative research.</p> <p>The various positions that participants take in relation to the phenomenon can be uncovered and the researcher can report on the similarities and differences seen.</p> <p>Strengths include an ability to explore feelings, opinions, and ideas towards a phenomenon in an analytical way and where the subjectivity of the researcher is reduced.</p>	<p>small sample sizes means that the generalisability of findings may be reduced.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a highly participatory method</li> <li>• Outside the scope of PhD research</li> </ul>
<p><i>Generic Qualitative Inquiry (GQI)</i></p>	<p><i>Can be considered when the parameters of the study do not meet the strict requirements of research designs with strict methodological requirements.</i></p> <p><i>A descriptive methodology aimed at understanding how individuals make meaning of a phenomenon or situation. Based on 'What will work best' in finding answers for the questions under investigation.</i></p> <p><i>May combine several qualitative approaches, but draw on a single approach, but deviate from its intent, guidelines, or rules, in a way that may be beneficial for the study.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Strengths as a method arise when little is known about a phenomenon, but when a rich, in-depth description is desired. It is useful to explore the "Who, What, Where" type questions.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Includes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Phenomenology</i></li> <li>- <i>Case studies</i></li> <li>- <i>Grounded Theory</i></li> <li>- <i>Ethnography</i></li> <li>- <i>Survey</i></li> <li>- <i>Narrative Enquiry</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Findings can be open to question or contradiction arising from a lack of theoretical / methodological basis.</i></p>

Of the GQI methods identified, survey offers the best fit with the research question and the bounds of this PhD research as highlighted in Table 4. The choice of a qualitative survey method is justified by its usefulness in answering questions about experience, meaning and perspective, most commonly from the standpoint of the participant (Hammarberg et al., 2016). The data is usually not amenable to counting or measuring; techniques include small group discussions for investigating beliefs, attitudes, and concepts of normative behaviour.

Ethnography was dismissed based on the required time period whilst theory development did not align with the research question.

*Table 5: Relevant situations for different research methods (Yin, 2014).*

Method	Form of Research Question	Requires control of behavioural events?	Focus on Contemporary events?
Experiment	How, why?	YES	YES
Survey	<i>Who, what, where, how many, how much?</i>	NO	YES
Archival Analysis	Who, what, where, how many, how much?	NO	YES/NO
History	How, why?	NO	NO
Case Study	How, why?	NO	YES

#### **4.2.1 Types of survey**

When considering survey as a research approach Jansen (2010) suggests that it is not inherent ontology that determines whether a study is quantitative or qualitative, but the method of analysis. In sociology the word survey refers to the study of a population through observation. A survey is qualitative if it does not count the frequency of categories but, rather, elicits empirical diversity and meaning. Jansen (2010) states that qualitative survey within social research is mostly only applied to questioning and conducting interviews with population samples. Survey can be classified into commonly used types; each will offer suitability dependent on the subject matter and context

involved. The choices of survey type for this research are highlighted in Table 6 with justification for their use in this research.

Table 6: Survey type and justification for its use (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Survey Type	Description and Use
<i>Interview</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A conversation between the researcher and participant to facilitate the gathering of useful information about the research subject. Can happen physically as a face-to-face interview or virtually via telephone, online platform etc.</i></li> <li>• <i>Provides an opportunity to connect with the research subject and establish some form of relationship.</i></li> <li>• <i>Allows the researcher to gain more insight into the information provided by the research participant during a conversation.</i></li> </ul>
Survey and questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A data collection tool that lists a set of structured questions to which respondents provide answers based on their knowledge and experiences.</li> <li>• Questions will be formulated dependent upon the research context and type of information required.</li> <li>• Many combine both open ended and closed questions including rating and semantic scales.</li> <li>• Allows the gathering of data from a large sample size with a lower cost of creation and administration to other research methods.</li> <li>• The validity of research can be affected by survey response bias and there is a tendency towards high dropout rates</li> </ul>
<i>Observation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A method of gathering data by paying attention to the actions and behaviours of the research subjects as they interact within their environment.</i></li> <li>• <i>Allows the gathering of first-hand information about the research subjects in line with the aims and objectives of the systematic investigation.</i></li> <li>• <i>Does not require specialisation or expertise in many areas.</i></li> </ul>
<i>Focus Groups</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>An open conversation with a small number of carefully selected participants who provide useful information for the researcher.</i></li> <li>• <i>The researcher acts as a moderator in the conversation, setting the tone and guiding the conversation within the aims and objectives of the research.</i></li> <li>• <i>Useful within qualitative research as an effective and cost-effective method of data collection from large or diverse populations.</i></li> <li>• <i>Of particular advantage is the ability to explore a variety of opinions and ideas that may emerge from group discussion</i></li> </ul>

*and the discovery of other salient points that may not have been considered within the systematic investigation.*

Table 7: Interview styles and rationale for use (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Style	Rationale
Structured	Also known as a standardised interview or researcher administered interview which may result in quantitative findings. A set of structured, premeditated set of questions are strictly adhered to throughout the conversation; Not suitable for this research for this reason
<i>Semi-Structured</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Often the sole source of information for qualitative researchers (DiCicco Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Suitable in this context where, despite premeditated questions being used, the researcher can veer from script if necessary.</i></li> <li>• <i>Similarly, the flexibility allows non-sequential questioning whilst maintaining the basic framework.</i></li> <li>• <i>Most suitable in this context where information on experience of specific areas of food literacy is sought.</i></li> </ul>
<i>Unstructured</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The researcher is able to leverage their knowledge and to creatively weave questions to help them get useful information from the participant.</i></li> <li>• <i>In conjunction with field notes and observation key informants serve as translators, teachers, mentors and commentators for the researcher (DiCicco Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).</i></li> <li>• <i>Offers usefulness with stakeholders within the context of this research for identifying and highlighting key issues, enablers and barriers for end beneficiaries.</i></li> </ul>

Table 8: Observation methods and rationale for use (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Style	Rationale
Complete Observer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher is entirely detached from the research environment.</li> <li>• Participants are unaware of the researcher's presence, and this allows them to act naturally as they interact with their environment</li> </ul>
<i>Observer as participant</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Requires the researcher to be involved in the research environment, albeit with limited interaction with the participants.</i></li> <li>• <i>The participants typically know the researcher and may be familiar with the goals and objectives of the investigation.</i></li> <li>• <i>Offers suitability for assessing contextual and environmental factors within this research in addition to the information relayed by participants.</i></li> </ul>
Participant as observer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher has some kind of relationship with the participants and interacts with them as they carry out the investigation.</li> <li>• Relationships may be built with the research sample whilst that community is aware of the research being undertaken.</li> </ul>
Complete participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher is an active member of the research environment whilst the research sample is unaware of the research process.</li> <li>• Dismissed as inappropriate and potentially ineffective within the context of this research.</li> </ul>

Where qualitative research is based on the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social world, issues are not simple and clean; they are intricately wired to political, social, historical, and especially personal contexts. These issues draw the researcher towards observing and drawing out the problems of the case which may

be conflicting and set against the complex backgrounds of human concern (Merriam, 1998 cited in Snyder, 2012; Stake, 2010). Stake (2010) questions whether readers will be satisfied with an objective 'tally of events' or, rather, with 'a description of events' which will bring out the essential character of a phenomenon. This guided decision making with regards to which methods to reject as inappropriate but, more importantly, which methods offered the best fit for the research question. Where there was heterogeneity within the research sample a single research method, for similar reasons, was deemed inappropriate; selecting a combination of interview, focus group, and observation offered the most effectiveness given the bounds and scope of this particular research.

Constructivist methodology, also known as interpretivism, assumes that reality is subjective, multiple, and socially constructed; we can only understand reality through the experience of that reality, which may differ from another person's reality shaped by their individual historical or social perspective. Incorporating intersectionality and complex systems thinking into theoretical perspectives can enhance the understanding of multifaceted social phenomena such as connections between various social categories like race, gender, sexuality, or class. Similarly, there is an acknowledgement of the unique experiences and oppressions that result from these overlapping classifications. Complex systems thinking explores the dynamic relationships and feedback loops that shape social systems. Drawing on social exclusion theories of poverty and cultural imperialism, as discussed within chapter two, the goal of this research is not to arrive at a universal truth or explanation which may favour one group over another but to value the multiplicity of realities that exist. A critique levelled upon qualitative enquiry is the absence of replicability and a potential lack of rigour. Triangulation, the use of multiple data sources, methods, investigators and theories (Creswell, 2009), has been used to provide a level of generalizability in other studies but, arguably, seeking triangulation is at odds with the goal of hearing the plurality of voices and, in the context of this exploratory survey, may even be considered premature.

#### **4.2.2 The application of emic and etic to the study of human behaviour.**

Drawn from linguistic theory and first utilised by Pike (1954 cited in Olive, 2014) etic, from the word 'phonetic' refers to the study of sounds which are universally used in human language. Specifically, etic refers to the function of sounds within a language regardless of their meaning. Emic, from the word phonemic, is primarily interested in the acoustics, external properties, and meanings of words.

Applied to the study of human behaviour: etic views from the outside of a particular system whereas emic studies from within. The etic encompasses an external view formed from culture, language, meaning, association, and real-world events. Primarily, the etic perspective is associated with that of the researcher given that it is comprised of the 'structures and criteria' developed outside of the culture as a framework for studying the culture. The adoption of an etic approach often involves the implementation of pre-existing theories, hypotheses, and perspectives as constructs to see if they apply to an alternate setting or culture. (Willis, 2007 cited in Olive, 2014). Lett (1990, cited in Olive, 2014) suggests that etic constructs are accounts, descriptions and analysis regarded as meaningful and appropriate by a community of scientific observers. However, if a researcher takes a purely etic approach to a study, they risk the possibility of overlooking hidden nuances, meanings and concepts that can only be gleaned through interview and observation. Within qualitative research there are several methodologies that favour the emic over the etic and vice-versa. However, regardless of the methodologies, many social researchers sit within the tension of the two extremes.

The debate surrounding the emic and etic approach is similar to discussions surrounding qualitative and quantitative methods; the concern highlighted with the former is that it is constructed from subjective knowledge and therefore unscientific, However, a poorly designed and informed quantitative study can be less effective than well designed qualitative research (Headland, 1990 cited in Galperin et al., 2022). Morris et al.(1999) suggest researchers who strive to describe a particular culture in its own terms, are usually designated as emic whereas those taking an outsider, comparative approach may be described as etic. The clearly defined quantitative vs qualitative

analogy is questioned by Tatli and Ozbligin (2012) who define emic as developing new categories from the data whilst etic uses predefined categories. It is suggested that, particularly within cross cultural research, that using an emic / etic approach decentralises a dominant approach and acknowledges other perspectives that may often be overlooked.

The cross-sectional time horizon of this research requires the identification of individuals or groups with a vested interest in the phenomena. For the purposes of this research these were termed 'Stakeholders' and 'Beneficiaries'. The Cambridge Dictionary (2023) defines stakeholders as "a person, an employee, customer, or citizen, who is involved with an organisation, society etc. and therefore has responsibilities towards it and an interest in its success". Therefore, in this context, stakeholders were differentiated from beneficiaries on the basis that they have some form of responsibility. Whilst beneficiaries could arguably be classified as customers on the basis of some form of transaction with the organisations, they do not have a responsibility to them. Oftentimes, but not always, beneficiaries may also have little or no involvement in the strategic and operational decision making, and will not be delivering an intervention but, rather, will be a focus or target.

This research could be defined as 'emic-etic' in several ways:

Firstly, where the phenomena of interest are food insecurity and food literacy, the cross-sectional stakeholder analysis identifies and explores the meanings attached from both the inside and outside of the experience of being food insecure. The comparison of differing cultures and populations enables the researcher to develop broader, cross cultural themes and concepts (Morris et al., 1999 cited in Olive, 2014). In this scenario it could be interpreted that stakeholders provide an etic perspective where the emic is given by end beneficiaries.

Secondly, this research is being undertaken following several years of operational experience in the field of delivering food literacy interventions and work in and around food insecurity which, arguably, adds an emic perspective to the research. This is not so

much that the research could be considered ethnographic, but enough to be able to build trust with both stakeholders and beneficiaries in order to elicit rich data. Stake (2010) suggests that one of the principal qualifications of qualitative researchers is experience. Rubin and Rubin (1995), drawing from interpretive and feminist methodology, propose that familiarity be encouraged between the interviewer and participant, whereby doing so more deeply meaningful interviewing can take place. However, as a researcher external to the everyday experiences of the research sample an element of the etic is maintained.

Finally, Galperin et al. (2022) suggest that the emic approach is best described as beginning with a blank page and allowing research participants to define and explain concepts in their own words which, in essence, was the rationale behind the research methods chosen. However, where Tatli and Ozbligin (2012) argue that using predefined categories is representative of the etic, it could be considered that the use of prechosen subject areas within interviews and focus groups represented this. However, in qualitative research, the divergence between the emic and the etic perspectives is now perceived as an opportunity rather than a limitation. Agar (2011), for example, suggests that the universal and the particular are not separate kinds of understanding when one person makes sense of another, they are both part of any understanding.

### **4.3 Ethics**

This research aims to achieve a positive risk: benefit ratio whilst ensuring the safeguarding of the independence and excellence of the research. Benefits include the positive impact from the research to the parties directly involved as well as the demonstrable contribution of research to knowledge, the economy and society. The risks and intrusions for people taking part in the research are minimised and justified by the expected benefits.

#### **4.3.1 Ethical approval**

Ethics approval was granted by The University of Hertfordshire Ethics Committee (protocol number **BUS/PGR/UH/05993**).

### **4.3.2 Ethical considerations**

#### *Accessibility and inclusion*

The research sample of interest may have included groups or individuals with additional communication needs, such as English for Speakers of other languages (ESOL), or literacy and reading age requiring additional support to ensure that fully informed consent was acquired (see below).

#### *Informed consent*

To ensure fully research was conducted with fully informed consent of participants a copy of the participant consent form and study information sheet (Appendix K) were provided in advance of interviews or focus groups taking place. To accommodate literacy issues or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and to reconfirm consent, the content of both forms was also read aloud and understanding confirmed ahead of data gathering.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without prejudice.

Signed consent forms were collected at face-to-face interviews / focus groups. Signed and scanned documents were collected ahead of any online / remote data collection.

#### *Confidentiality and data management*

Careful consideration of the issue of confidentiality and data protection was implemented throughout the research process; process considered the General Data Protection Regulation Requirements (GDPR). Access to any unredacted voice recordings, transcripts, images, or documents (where necessary) was restricted to myself, my supervision team, and any engaged transcription services. Where data in the form of quotations have been reported in this thesis the identity of contributors has been

protected through anonymisation. Similarly, the names of any settings or services have been removed and locations (where necessary) limited to a general rather than specific location.

Research governance requires adequate storage of participant's personal data. Hard copy consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet in my workplace which is only accessible by myself. All electronic files, including voice files, transcripts, ethics documents, electronic consent forms) were stored on the University's Office 365 system. No materials were stored on removable storage devices, e.g. USB sticks, etc.

#### *Due and undue research incentives for diverse socio-economic populations*

As per national guidelines and organisational ethics codes, compensation for effort, time, and inconvenience of research may have been made available to research participants. No inducements were offered with the intent of luring into participation. Guidelines suggest that the selection of non-coercive incentives may ensure the voluntary nature of participation and that research burdens are not born unequally by economically disadvantaged populations. However, whilst appropriate monetary incentives may strengthen the generalisability and representiveness of involved stakeholders by providing a balance of individuals from all economic levels appropriate to the research question, no remuneration was offered for participation in this research. The risk to purely altruistic participation may be heightened where financial inducement may create bias, particularly amongst low-income groups. Similarly, a 'halo effect' may be created where participants provide responses that they believe the researcher requires rather than from an experiential and honest perspective.

The informed consent process, reminding of the freedom to refuse participation or withdraw their consent at any time without repercussions, acted as adequate protection against potential coercion.

Cultural sensitivities, such as consent resting with an individual other than those being observed, was considered, and deemed satisfactorily addressed by the process of administering participant information sheets and consent forms.

#### *Conflicts of interest*

There were no known conflicts of interest (such as gifts from or financial holdings in companies involved in the research, sponsorship or reimbursement from entities that might put pressure on the researcher, rights to ownership or publication of data, conflicts between ethics and organisational demands).

## **4.4 Data collection**

For the purposes of this research the research sample can be categorised under two broad headings.

Stakeholders are defined as a person or entity with an interest in the commissioning, funding or delivery of food aid or food literacy interventions. Similarly, those who may have insight or professional interest such as working within policy development. A range of roles and responsibilities were represented including Charity Trustees, EFAI managers and directors with strategic and operational responsibilities as well as volunteers, including those with lived experience of food insecurity. The inclusion of stakeholders within the research sample is justified by the level of influence on EFAIs. In particular, where financial support may be contingent upon the delivery of particular impacts, reaching a particular number of beneficiaries. Similarly, to enable the exploration of how strategic priorities align with the requirements of intended audiences.

An analysis guided the identification and recruitment of stakeholder participants. Key groups with a role in extended food aid interventions were identified, primarily drawing upon previous professional experience within the sector but also drawn from the nature of actors identified within the literature review. These were mapped based on their role or function with the intention of ensuring that each was represented within the research

sample. The research sample was populated in several ways. Firstly, professional networks were leveraged and utilised to identify potential research participants either by direct invitation, by recommendation using social media tools such as LinkedIn and through searches for food aid interventions based on geographical area. Convenience sampling engaged further participants as part of case study work undertaken in conjunction with Hertfordshire Business School and FareShare UK as outlined in section 4.4.1. Other groups and individuals were identified through desk-based research particularly those with policy and commissioning responsibilities, such as Public Health Commissioners or those responsible for Food Poverty Action Plans. Snowball sampling was utilised, following initial interviews with stakeholders. This was used to fill identify gaps in representation of participants identified within the stakeholder analysis and where recommendation may have encouraged participation rather than responding to unsolicited approaches. Sampling was considered complete when adequate representation was achieved or no new, relevant information acquired, e.g. data saturation.

Beneficiaries are defined as those people accessing or benefitting from food aid or food literacy interventions being delivered. In some instances, a degree of crossover between stakeholder and beneficiary status was evident, such as where volunteers both support delivery but also benefit from interventions.

Participants qualifying as stakeholders when contributing to this research but with lived experience of food insecurity are indicated as such in Appendix N. All participants fulfilling an operational role, regardless of being paid or in a voluntary capacity, are classified as stakeholders. This is justified on the basis that the role, rather than how it may or may not be remunerated, has influence on the mechanisms of EFAls and how they may be experienced by beneficiaries.

Stakeholders are defined as a person or entity with an interest in the commissioning, funding or delivery of food aid or food literacy interventions. Similarly, those who may have insight or professional interest such as working within policy development or academia.

Whilst exploring the same areas of interest, questions designed for stakeholders and beneficiaries differed slightly. Stakeholder questions sought responses around the perceived need for interventions, the intentions and motivations of interventions, what the perceptions of successful interventions are as well as narratives around the experiences of the beneficiaries they serve. Research with beneficiaries explored the pre-existence or otherwise of various components of food literacy and how, if relevant, these may be impacted by food insecurity.

Where the stakeholders and beneficiaries of settings participating in this research operated or ran extended services beyond the provision of food aid, such as cookery courses, cafes, or shared meals, the questions for both groups would also seek to explore the motivations for running and attending these. Similarly, what, if any, impacts these interventions may have had.

#### **4.4.1 First phase**

Where criticism of the qualitative method has extended to questioning reliability, Yin (2014) advocates that conducting a pilot case study ahead of the main activity of data collection mitigates this. Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that good preparation is the key to successful qualitative interviewing. Drawing from this, a decision was made to conduct an initial phase of research using interviews to assess how appropriate the methods and questioning used may be going forwards. Where the literature review identified an absence of data informed by those directly impacted by the issues in question it was necessary to ensure that the questions being asked within interviews, and follow up focus group, were relevant and relatable. This was particularly pertinent when a limitation considered of qualitative interviews is a lack of breadth because of smaller sample sizes (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Undertaking pilot work allows the testing, refinement, and modification of questions to be asked of interviewees if necessary. Additionally, the process supports the development of the researcher as interviewer (Barbour, 2014).

A list of questions was developed, ahead of the interviews being conducted, that had been informed by areas of research interest identified within the literature review process (Appendices H and I) exploring experiences and opinions around food insecurity and food literacy.

A pre-existing relationship between The University of Hertfordshire and the food redistribution charity FareShare was leveraged to identify two food aid interventions during the initial recruitment phase. While the aims of this PhD research aligned with a discrete FareShare pilot project exploring cookery interventions using repurposed food this project was ultimately not delivered due to organisational changes within FareShare. Although FareShare associated settings met the inclusion criteria for the study, the pre-existing institutional relationship did not shape the research design, data collection, analytical framework, or findings of this thesis beyond adjustments to the mechanisms of data elicitation as will be outlined below.

Both settings were operational and delivering food aid projects, therefore ensuring that participants met the inclusion criteria of either working towards the mitigation of or experiencing food insecurity. The first setting, in a deprived residential area typified many local and hyper local services nationally that have evolved beyond the provision of emergency food aid and now offered food pantry services using a membership model. The organisation had secured funding to support with the setting up of a community café from which there were aspirations to deliver practical cookery lessons for adults and young people. The second setting was a social enterprise in a city centre that offered free and low-cost meals to those in need alongside work-based training opportunities. A café space had already been established.

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken across two locations with a total of 6 stakeholder participants with strategic and operational responsibilities. 3 of these stakeholders fulfilled voluntary roles and as previous beneficiaries were considered to have lived experience of FI. These settings (Appendix M) and participants (Appendix N)

are included within the overall research sample. Interviews were conducted in August 2023.

Stakeholder questions were designed to introduce the broad subject area of interest including components of food literacy, experiences of food insecurity and what stakeholders hope to achieve from the projects that were being delivered. Questions were open ended and designed to encourage conversation. Where the literature review had identified fewer papers informed by first hand experiences of end beneficiaries it was hoped that this may expose previously unidentified information regarding food literacy and food insecurity.

Representative of the need for reflexivity, the process was designed to ensure that the choice of research method was appropriate and that the questions used within the interview process elicited the information required. A review following this process identified the need for refinement of both the model for subsequent stakeholder interviews and follow up focus groups both in the questions asked and the mechanism of asking.

Where the aim of using semi-structured interviews was to elicit first-hand information and description of real-world experiences regarding food literacy and food insecurity, the use of language needed to be commensurate with the vocabulary of the interviewee which may differ from the academic terminology in identified literature. The interview process was not suitable for all end users where it was noted that respondents felt they needed to give the 'right answers' rather than illustrating their own subjective experiences, this was felt to be attributable to the discomfort of being placed in an interview situation which may have negative associations for some respondents. Finally, the complexity of the subject area and the multiplicity of first-hand experiences provided a greater range of data than the original list of questions would have encompassed.

As a result of this test phase, it was decided that the interview method would be used only for stakeholders i.e. having some form of professional or operational role whether in a paid or voluntary capacity. Interviews would also be unstructured or conversational but

with prompts, to allow new information to be uncovered. For service users or beneficiaries, it was felt that focus groups comprised of peers would offer a less 'confrontational' environment and, potentially, support with discovering collective experiences and opinions. Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that focus groups have the potential to access forms of knowledge other methods cannot and are particularly suitable for dealing with issues of a potentially sensitive nature where they provide an open, supportive environment in which participants can talk in depth.

It has been argued that, whilst more commonly employed as part of participant observation techniques, the use of informal conversations in qualitative research creates greater ease of communication and produce more naturalistic data (Swain and King, 2022). The authors suggest that this may sometimes not only be the best way of eliciting information but the best way. Conversations were also to be used throughout the research to supplement the more formal research methods of focus groups and semi-structured interview.

#### **4.4.2 Rationale for research sample size and recruitment methods**

Purposeful maximal sampling (Creswell, 2009) was used to acquire different perspectives on the issues surrounding the research question.

The issue of sample size has been highlighted, Patton (2002 cited in Braun and Clarke, 2013) argues that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry and a sample size of around fifteen to thirty individual interviews tends to be common where patterns across data are sought. Sandelowski (1995) indicates that a numerical figure may be inadequate, and the sample should be driven by factors including what is wanting to be known, the purpose of the enquiry, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the time and resources available.

The point at which additional data fails to generate new information, known as saturation, is commonly an indicator that an adequate sample size has been achieved. This enables the researcher to acquire enough data to create a rich narrative but without

having so much that it precludes deep, complex engagement with the data in the time available (Morse, 1995; Sandelowski, 1995; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005 cited in Creswell, 2009). However, Creswell (2009) proposes that saturation is not the only option and could be interpreted as portraying a particular model of qualitative research that is experiential and more positivist where data are collected to provide a 'complete and truthful' picture of the phenomena. Arguably, this is at odds with the constructivist methodology of this research and a theoretical position not subscribed to by all qualitative researchers.

The purposeful and stratified sampling undertaken for allows an in-depth focus of the phenomena in question, allows exploration of the information rich cases with the goal of learning about the issues of central importance from various perspectives and from which further research can be undertaken. Where survey has been identified as the most appropriate research method, because it is an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, there is acknowledgement that the boundaries between a phenomenon and its context are not always clear, and it relies on multiple data sources. The sample acquired for this research achieves this. The research outcome sought is to provide a comprehensive understanding that allows others to apply the principles and lessons learnt. The goal is to achieve findings that offer transferability, which is different to the generalisability sought within quantitative research. (Miles, Huberman and Saldana cited in Schoch, 2020; Yin, 2014). Nonetheless, where this may be critiqued as lacking robustness, the function of the qualitative researcher is to offer interpretation of the observations and other data which have also been called assertions, themselves a form of generalisation (Stake, 2010).

#### **4.4.3 Characteristics of the research sample.**

The nature of the EFAls participating in this research is detailed in Appendix M including the region in which the setting is located, the nature of extended food aid activities delivered and the geography of the setting. Also included are those participants unaffiliated to a specific setting but who have influence over the delivery of EFAls, for example campaigners and commissioners. Finally, a justification for their inclusion is provided. In total, 22 settings participated in this research.

The characteristics of the participants within the research sample are shown in Appendix N for example, the participants’ gender, age range, and relationship to the intervention e.g. stakeholder or beneficiary. In addition, it is highlighted whether the participant has lived experience of food insecurity. For the purposes of this research accessing food aid interventions acted as qualification of experiencing food insecurity unless overtly stipulated. A total of 3 beneficiaries did not identify as having lived experience of FI.

Table 9 provides a summary of the total number of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and conversations conducted with participants and the breakdown of participant numbers within each.

*Table 9: Data Collection Methods and Number of Participants*

Data Collection Method	n	Participants
Semi Structured Interview	32	32
Focus Group	4	14
Conversation	5	11

1 focus group was conducted with stakeholders involved in the commissioning of EFAI projects at a regional level with 3 participants including representation from Public Health, County Councils and Local Authorities. 2 focus groups were conducted with stakeholders of 2 settings, both were made up of individuals in the strategic and operational delivery of EFAIs including food pantries, community meals, and cookery classes.

At a third setting, a third focus group was conducted with the attendees of a structured series of cookery lessons. These 6 beneficiaries, both male and female, ranged in age from young adult to older adults. All of these beneficiaries identified as experiencing food insecurity.

Conversations were had with stakeholders (n=3) operating a food pantry in a small town setting and beneficiaries (n= 8) of a food pantry and community café run from a small church. Beneficiaries were all women ranging from young adult to older adult.

#### **4.4.5 Stakeholders: interview procedures**

Interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient times with participants given expectations around duration to ensure the minimum amount of distraction wherever possible. Where possible, interviews were conducted at the setting where extended food aid activities took place for two reasons. Firstly, drawing from Feminist interviewing methodology where the interviewer participates and shares, this encourages familiarity between the interviewer and interviewee(s) therefore eliciting more deeply meaningful data (Rubin and Rubin, 1995 cited in Snyder, 2012). Using a familiar and comfortable environment and taking time to build rapport was key to achieving this. Secondly, this enabled the collection of field notes to provide context. Where face to face interviews were not possible, online platforms (e.g. MS Teams) were used. Interviews were recorded using the Alice iPhone app, which records and transcribes verbatim. Interviews using online platforms were also recorded and transcribed using MS Teams software. Transcriptions were then re-read alongside the audio recording.

Observations made by the researcher whilst undertaking interviews were noted at the time, where possible and where this would not be to the detriment of the research process, or immediately after the interviews and visits had concluded. These included notes on the local environment, buildings, locations, general activities, and impressions that may be relevant in later analysis.

Where this research employs a cross-sectional time horizon, and for reasons discussed, methods for exploring the experiences and opinions of beneficiary groups differed to those used for stakeholders.

#### **4.4.6 Stakeholders: questions**

Stakeholders were invited to introduce themselves and provide a background to their experience or interest in the areas of food insecurity and food literacy. The interviewee's role or capacity regarding the commissioning, design, or delivery of interventions was explored. Respondents were asked about the motivations for any interventions delivered, potential barriers and enablers to success and what they perceived challenges to be as well as how success might be measured. Exploration then moved to perceptions of need and beneficiary experiences (Appendix H).

#### **4.4.7 Beneficiaries: Recruitment methods and inclusion criteria**

An extent of convenience sampling was implemented to populate the research sample of beneficiaries. This was implemented by identifying and inviting those accessing services and interventions to participate. This was conducted in two ways; Firstly, where settings had delivered some form of food literacy intervention to beneficiaries in addition to accessing food aid services, those participating were invited to participate in a focus group. Secondly, by prior arrangement, visits to food aid settings took place whilst services were operational. Recorded conversations then took place. Those interviewed had often been pre-selected or informed of potential participation by the stakeholder running the intervention. However, in the interests of acquiring a balanced perspective some conversations were carried out with beneficiaries approached at settings and invited to participate.

Survey was chosen as a research method in order to, as far as possible, accommodate the heterogeneity of the research population, therefore a sample size was sought that reflected multiple realities and experiences of beneficiaries whilst also acknowledging that data saturation was both potentially unlikely and unnecessary. In particular, it was acknowledged that the scope of PhD research precludes the kind of sample size that would see a level of saturation achieved. This can be justified where this sampling method could be considered akin to purposive and theoretical sampling (Seale, 2009). Purposeful on the basis that interviewees have a significant relationship to the research

topic and may be broadly reflective of the population of interest and theoretical on the basis that the sample supports with the aim of developing insight into the research area and the ideas of particular groups rather than the wider public.

#### **4.4.8 Beneficiaries: Data collection methods**

Those taking part in the research process did so with the full understanding that they may withdraw at any point and for any reason. Consent was acquired from all participants using University of Hertfordshire approved methods and paperwork (Appendices J and K) in all instances. Research was conducted at mutually convenient times with expectations given around duration to ensure the minimum amount of distraction wherever possible.

Focus groups and conversations, conducted with beneficiaries of extended food aid interventions (Appendix N; Table 9) were conducted in person within the premises where interventions were delivered for two reasons. Drawing from the emic perspective, and employing feminist interviewing methodology, where the interviewer participates and shares, this encouraged familiarity between the interviewer and the interviewee(s) and therefore increased the potential for deeply meaningful data to be elicited (Rubin and Rubin, 1995 cited in Snyder, 2012). The use of a familiar environment and taking time to build rapport was key to achieving this. Secondly, given the proposed methods of data analysis conducting research on site optimised the potential for other forms of data collection such as photographs and experiencing the physical context first hand with which to create field notes.

A schedule facilitated the focus groups (Appendices H & I). Questions and areas for discussion were developed based on the areas of interest of the research question(s) and gaps identified in the literature review. a definition of food literacy was provided to respondents before eliciting responses. However, following on from the first phase of this research care was taken to ensure that the use of food insecurity was used

judiciously with beneficiaries to minimise negative reactions or alienation where there was potential that participants may not self-identify as food insecure.

Instead, prompts around food insecurity included enquiry about challenges to day-to-day resourcing and preparation of household food provision, strategies employed to mitigate these including what services, if any, are accessed as part of this. Similarly, questions were asked about the component factors of food literacy, the acquisition of procedural and declarative knowledge. Finally, questions focussed on the social and emotional impacts of food literacy and food insecurity. In line with the research philosophy, these subject areas were used to guide conversation where necessary, but participants were also encouraged to discuss issues pertinent to them as part of the focus group.

Conversations, with individuals and in groups where appropriate, were conducted more informally to encourage participants to share experiences, sentiments, and opinions around the subject area of food literacy and food insecurity but, pertinently, guided by what was of importance to the respondent rather than the researcher.

#### **4.4.9 Observations and field notes**

Where possible hand written notes were taken during interviews and focus groups. However, in order to minimise unnecessary disruption to the flow of conversation, any additional significant observations and researcher reflections were recorded as voice notes as quickly as possible after leaving each setting. These voice notes were then transcribed and stored. Appendix O provides an example of a field note transcription. In conjunction with notes made during interviews and focus groups, these transcriptions were utilised to evidence the context in which the research was conducted and support the process of critical discourse analysis.

With prior permission from stakeholders, photographs of the various settings participating in the research were also taken as a form of pictorial field note and stored with the purpose of providing further context .

#### **4.4.10 Addressing variations in stakeholder-to-beneficiary ratios**

Previous research in lived experience of food insecurity (Thompson et al., 2018) has highlighted practical and ethical challenges around interviewing. The potential pre-existence of complex or chaotic lives and probable previous experiences of marginalisation create a reluctance to participate. Additionally, those in supporting roles frequently display hesitancy around passing on contact details or introduce beneficiaries to researchers.

There was a proportionately lower ratio of end beneficiaries to stakeholders (Appendix N). However, in total 25 participants (42%) indicated having lived experience of food insecurity, this was made up of current beneficiaries of EFAls (n = 22) supplemented by stakeholders involved in the operational delivery of EFAls in a voluntary capacity (n = 6) who indicated that they had previously accessed support from the settings visited.

Critiques questioning the robustness of studies concerned with lived experience are mitigated by the proximity of those delivering interventions to those accessing them (Thompson et al., 2018). Many volunteers have firsthand lived experience or long standing relationships of trust, which offer a strong overview.

#### **4.5 Notes on Research context**

This sub-section aims to provide the context in which data was collected. Context is a necessary consideration in the process of critical discourse analysis and, similarly, where the aim of qualitative research is to provide an in-depth understanding of real-world phenomena, the natural contexts in which individuals or groups operate should be considered (Korstjens and Moser, 2017; Machin and Mayr, 2023).

Whilst no form of triangulation is sought within this research, characteristics of the organisations and participants were recorded throughout the data collection phase (Appendices M & N) in anticipation of potential commonalities or differences becoming evident during analysis. An initial analytic observation was that no significant differences were noted in the responses of participants based on gender, age, or region. This should not be interpreted as evidence that such differences do not exist, but rather reflects the qualitative and purposive nature of the sample, which was not designed to support demographic comparison or claims of representativeness. Demographic information was collected to support reflexive engagement with the data and to sensitise the analysis to potential points of convergence or difference, rather than to establish causal or comparative relationships. Instead, the relative consistency of accounts points to the extent to which food insecurity and food literacy, within the contexts examined, was shaped by material constraints such as limited resources, restricted access to food, and a lack of choice rather than by individual characteristics.

Similar observations have been made within the literature, where structural drivers of food insecurity are shown to produce common experiential patterns across diverse populations (Dowler and Lambie-Mumford, 2015; Power, 2017). As analysis progressed this interpretation was reinforced across the dataset with no consistent differences evident in the participant accounts.

#### **4.5.1 Defining food aid interventions**

Where previous chapters have cited statistics regarding the increase in distribution of emergency food parcels to highlight the incidence of food insecurity in the United Kingdom, within the context of this research, food aid interventions extend beyond this. Food aid interventions are defined as mechanisms where food, and often other provisions such as personal hygiene, household, and baby products, are distributed at a reduced cost or free of charge. Beneficiaries of food aid are generally, but not exclusively, those who could be considered as living with or at risk of food insecurity.

In most instances, the food aid interventions within this research operated some form of transactional model which provided beneficiaries with the opportunity to select products in exchange for a nominal or reduced payment. This contrasts with the 'traditional' food bank model which generally entails a predetermined selection of foods to last for around three days; parcels are exchanged for a voucher acquired by referral agencies. These agencies include, but are not limited to, Citizen's Advice Bureaux, Children's Centres, Health visitors, or GP surgeries. Settings also provided what could be classified as extended food aid or food literacy interventions ranging from community cafes and meal provision to cookery and nutrition education programmes.

#### **4.5.2 Settings**

The research sample (Appendix N) included interviewees from a range of settings (Appendix M) including those affiliated to faith-based organisations and churches, attachment to other organised activity such as young people's training organisations, and hyper local community projects.

Supply is often resourced through food rescue which offers access to reduced cost provision for many organisations targeting those experiencing food insecurity. However, food rescue also supports organisations with environmental, or sustainability aims, such as reducing avoidable food waste. Consequentially, some settings operated a 'catch-all' policy whereby there was a dual ambition of food waste reduction and impacting food insecurity.

#### **4.5.3 Supply**

In each instance, a proportion of the food acquired to supply the food aid intervention included, but was not exclusively, that which was either donated to or purchased by the setting at a heavily discounted price.

Donated food could be categorised in two ways; firstly, products acquired from community collection points in supermarkets and other retailers purchased and donated by the public. Secondly, products acquired for free from retailers that had entered the retail system but was no longer considered suitable for sale for some reason such as a short shelf life or damaged packaging.

The bulk of produce tended to be acquired from food rescue charities, including FareShare. FareShare, the UK's largest food redistribution charity, is comprised of eighteen independent organisations. The model of redistribution involves the acquisition of surplus food from across the food industry and supplying approximately 8,000 frontline charities and community groups. Many of the settings interviewed operated under the FareShare Community Food Membership (CFM) scheme. In return for a nominal fee, that covered operational costs, settings were linked with a regional centre that provided the food. Supply was classified as surplus for a variety of reasons and could have been direct from growers, a manufacturer, or a retailer's distribution centre. Fundamentally, food resourced through the CFM route was deemed surplus prior to entering general retail.

In some instances, similar food redistribution models operated with local level umbrella organisations acting as a conduit for the redistribution of surplus produce. In one instance an independently operated food hub was supplied with produce that was considered to be surplus from other local food charities and food projects.

Supply was often supplemented with products purchased using available funds at retail prices from wholesalers and supermarkets. The decision of what was purchased falling to one or two individuals with organisational responsibilities but often based on 'what sells'.

#### **4.5.4 Funding streams**

Operating a transactional model creates income streams through which projects fund supply, however supplementation is often required from other sources where produce is

retailed at heavily discounted prices. Interventions tend to be scaffolded by a combination of grants and donations. In some cases, local authority funding, for example from public health or other community focussed departments, keeps interventions operational. The increased awareness of food insecurity, itself an unexpected outcome of the covid 19 pandemic, had realised an increased level of donations for some charities which was being drawn down from at the time of research. Other projects were, or intended to when research took place, operate cross subsidisation models where sales generated via extended projects such as community meals and educational courses would support food aid provision.

#### 4.6 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis, given its applicability in research focussing on subjective experiences, views, and opinions was employed to analyse the data collected from the interviews, focus groups, and conversations, as well as any other data gathered during fieldwork. The six-phase approach, as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2022) was employed as a framework for the process of analysis (Table 12). Notably, Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest that the terminology of a ‘phased’ approach rather than steps is significant; steps imply a linear process whereas there may be a blurring between phases and different processes may be revisited non-sequentially and on multiple occasions.

Table 10: The stages of Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022)

Phase	Application
Familiarisation with the data	It is recommended that the researcher become intimately familiar with the data at an early stage in order to uncover information that may be pertinent to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Interviews, focus groups, and conversations were recorded and transcribed using the Alice app. Where it may be argued that auto-transcription limits engagement with the data, mitigation occurred where transcripts were always cross checked against the audio recording. This also began the process of engaging analytically. Where fieldwork notes were taken, usually in the form of a voice recording with thoughts that might potentially become useful or prompt discussion in the analysis phase, these were also transcribed, revisited and uploaded to NVivo.

	<p>Further familiarisation with the data occurred during the process of sorting, filing and preparation of transcripts for coding.</p>
Generating initial codes	<p>NVivo V14 is a software package that is used for the collection and management of text-based data; NVivo supports with the process of coding, and the analysis of large volumes of data.</p> <p>Two coding processes were used; in the first instance an inductive process was used where data was identified as relating to a prepopulated framework. This framework consisted of component factors of food literacy and food insecurity as identified within the systematic literature review. This could also be conceived as semantic thematic analysis where it focussed on the surface meaning of the data acquired and aimed to identify themes based on what had been explicitly stated (Braun and Clarke, 2021).</p> <p>Secondly, a deductive process was employed that created codes for data that appeared pertinent and emergent. This second process could be conceived as latent where it was focused on exploring the underlying, covert and often implicit meaning of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Where context offers relevance, images acquired during the field work phase would be used to support emergent themes.</p> <p>Transcripts were screened for content relevant to the research question(s) which, whilst reducing the volume of content, resulted in a substantial initial number of codes. A process was undertaken that reviewed the codes for potential semantic duplication and where nuance within the emergent meaning could render amalgamation of some codes useful.</p> <p>Appendix O provides a sample of an anonymised transcript whilst Appendices N and O provide samples of coding using NVivo software.</p>
Initial theme generation	<p>The generation of themes within the data as an iterative process was employed. The initial codes identified within Phase 2 were revisited and organised into loose groups under broad headings. This process also enabled the initial identification of relationships between themes to take place. Braun and Clarke (2022) acknowledge that early terminology of ‘searching’ for themes may be misleading. Theme development is an active process with themes constructed by the researcher, based around the data, and dependent upon factors such as the research question(s), the researcher’s knowledge and insight.</p>
Developing and reviewing potential themes	<p>Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest that the relationship between inductive and deductive coding and how data is labelled is not dichotomous but tends towards a spectrum. Therefore, initial themes were reviewed against how well they may or may not respond to the research questions and how they interact with each</p>

	<p>other. Notable, however, was the need to retain the social constructivist position of this research and to ensure that what was deemed significant was not lost as an expense of rationalisation or because it lay outside any kind of patterns found within the data.</p> <p>'Negative Case analysis' is a methodological approach that involves finding and discussing data that contradict the explanations emerging from the research. It is the process of revisiting your analysis each time a new negative case arises and continuing this revision until your study can explain the majority of the data captured. Negative cases are those in which the respondent's viewpoints differ or seem to not support the main body of evidence but still offer insight.</p>
<p>Refining, defining, and naming themes</p>	<p>The process of refining, defining, and naming themes was facilitated by the creation of thematic maps (Appendices E,F,G) that sought to explain and depict the interplay between the key areas of research interest: Food Literacy and Food Insecurity. The key constituent factors of both areas, as identified within the systematic literature review, were utilised to name candidate themes whilst new emergent themes were also created from areas of interest identified within the data.</p> <p>An additional thematic map (Appendix H) was created for themes relating to extended food aid interventions.</p>
<p>Producing the report</p>	<p>The production of the report occurs throughout the research process where field notes and reflexive journals which, whilst informal, supports the creation of more formal writing later on. The aim of this phase is to create a coherent and persuasive narrative that addresses the research question(s).</p>

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) offers flexibility and an interpretive approach to qualitative data analysis which supports the identification and analysis of themes within a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). Proponents of RTA typically acknowledge the interpretive nature of data coding (Braun et al., 2019 cited in Byrne, 2022) and eschew the positivistic concept of reliability within coding. This aligns with the social constructivist position of this research and the valuing of individual experience over commonality. Braun and Clarke (2013) state that codes and themes do not 'emerge' from the data, nor do they 'reside' waiting to be uncovered. Instead, codes and themes are simply the interpretations of the researcher. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that a different researcher may produce different themes dependent upon their own

experiences and self-reflexivity; in addition, variables such as the relationship between researcher and interviewee and what the interviewee may be willing to share, their experiences and their position at the time of interview may alter the data included within any analysis.

#### 4.7 Critical Discourse Analysis

Alongside reflexive thematic analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been identified and employed in this research. While thematic analysis is used to identify recurring patterns and themes across the dataset, CDA extends this analysis by interrogating how those themes are discursively constructed and what effects they have. Thematic analysis addresses *what* is being discussed, whereas CDA can be applied to examine *how* and *why* it might be articulated in particular ways. These approaches are therefore complementary rather than contradictory. The aim is for CDA to provide a deeper critical layer to the interpretation of identified themes.

Historically, critically analysing discourse has been used to expose how unconscious ways of speaking may sustain social injustice. For example, Fairclough (1995, cited in Machin and Mayr, 2023) highlights how language is used to maintain, challenge, or reproduce power and inequality. In addition, Bloor and Bloor (2007) state that our ideologies may not always be held consciously and that beliefs and attitudes can be so deeply ingrained that we take them for granted as self-evident. Where this occurs, it becomes much harder to question, even to oneself, and therefore extremely hard to challenge norms held within the social arena. CDA acts as a tool for elicitation.

Enabling researchers to move beyond *what* is said and supporting the interrogation of the social and political contexts that give words their meaning has been shown to be particularly effective for constructivist methodologies. Thematic analysis is enriched by challenging implicit assumptions within responses and situating them within wider sociopolitical discourses (Wodak and Meyer, 2001).

CDA has previously been shown to be a valuable tool in examining the complexity of food insecurity, food literacy, and poverty, where, as a method, it allows the elicitation of underlying tensions and power imbalances. Whilst focusing on food insecurity in Canada, Ormandy et al. (2025) revealed dominant narratives of individual responsibility. Others have utilised CDA within high-income countries more broadly to evidence that food poverty is often depicted through the lens of food bank use and physical health consequences with structural causes and solutions largely overlooked (Kerins et al, 2023; McIsaac et al., 2018)

In this study, CDA provides a key analytical approach for examining how experiences of food insecurity and food literacy are constructed, understood, and negotiated within the UK context through the language used by different actors. Here, the method has increased applicability given the potential for various perspectives on causes and solutions, particularly where dominant narratives frequently individualise structural problems, moralise behaviour, and obscure relations of power. CDA is shown to be most effective when examining what may be considered to be less tangible. For example, the emotional and social impacts of food insecurity, the extrinsic factors of food literacy, and the sustainability of interventions. Evidence of the challenges around dignity, agency, and inclusion are particularly attributable to the use of CDA.

Where the study is concerned not only with participants' experiences but also with how those experiences are shaped, constrained, and interpreted through dominant ideologies and narratives within food aid spaces, there is greater pertinence in the use of CDA. The focus on investigating embedded assumptions aligns closely with this research's underpinning theoretical foundations of social exclusion and cultural imperialism. By focusing on discourse, the analysis connects micro-level interactions and narratives to macro-level structures, demonstrating how everyday talk reflects and reinforces broader systems of power.

#### **4.7.1 Conceptual foundations and application of CDA**

CDA is grounded in the assumption that discourse is dialectically related to social structures: discourse is shaped by social conditions, while simultaneously shaping

those conditions (Fairclough, 2013). Language is understood as shaping social meaning and relationships, while also reflecting the social and institutional contexts in which it operates. As Fairclough argues, discourse contributes to the construction of social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief. Van Dijk (2001) further emphasises the role of discourse in reproducing dominance, highlighting how elite or institutional narratives often normalise inequality by framing it as natural, inevitable, or individualised.

CDA is both a theory of and a methodology for analysing these social moments. This includes attention to what is said, how it is said, and what remains unsaid. Elements of discourse such as framing, metaphor, categorisation, and evaluative language are understood as mechanisms through which particular worldviews are legitimised while others are marginalised. CDA therefore considers both what is said and also what may not be in discourse, recognising silence as analytically meaningful.

This study draws upon the three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which understands discourse as operating across three interrelated levels: text, discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough, 2013). This provides a structured but flexible way of examining how language is used, how it draws on wider social narratives, and how it is embedded within broader relations of power.

At the textual level, analysis attends closely to the language used within interview transcripts. This includes examining word choice, metaphors, evaluative terms, and recurring ways of speaking about food insecurity and food literacy. Particular attention is paid to moralising language and deficit-based framings, especially where responsibility, competence, and agency are implicitly or explicitly attributed to individuals. Equally important are silences, pauses, and omissions within participants' accounts.

At the level of discursive practice, the analysis explores how participants draw upon, reproduce, or contest wider discourses relating to food insecurity, food education, and food aid provision. This includes attention to contradiction within discourse. For example, where accounts reflect broader policy narratives, public health messaging, or organisational ways of framing need, support, and responsibility which may be at odds

with overtly intended aims or outcomes. Discursive positioning is also examined, focusing on how individuals position themselves and others within these narratives—for example, where stakeholders may assume roles of benefactor and how that influences dynamics within relationships.

At the level of social practice, the analysis situates these discourses within their wider social, economic, and political contexts. This involves examining how dominant ways of talking about food insecurity and food literacy align with neoliberal welfare logics, charitable models of provision, and culturally embedded assumptions about food, taste, and ‘proper’ eating practices. Analysing discourse at this level makes it possible to consider how language contributes to the reproduction of inequality, stigma, and exclusion, while also identifying moments where participants resist dominant narratives or articulate alternative ways of understanding food insecurity and support.

#### **4.7.2 Researcher positionality and its impact on RTA and CDA**

As outlined in Section 1.4, this research adopts an emic-etic orientation and privileges the lived experiences and interpretations of food insecurity and food literacy from across the research sample. The impetus for this research and this methodological commitment to an emic perspective, is closely connected to the researcher’s extensive professional background in the design and delivery of practical food interventions. These include, but are not limited to, food insecure populations.

This positionality has informed access to research settings, shaped interactions with participants, and interpreted the reflexive lens through which data has been analysed. Acknowledging this positioning is essential in understanding how knowledge has been co-produced and reframes what may be considered a bias as a strength.

For example, It is notable that CDA does not treat research as neutral or value-free. Instead, it recognises that all research involves interpretation and therefore the researcher plays an active role in making sense of the data. Within CDA, the purpose is to move beyond description and to examine how language reflects and reinforces

particular ideas, assumptions and power relations. Reflexivity is regarded as a strength of this approach rather than a weakness, and the researcher's role in the analytical process is explicitly and transparently articulated (Fairclough, 1995, cited in Machin and Mayr, 2023).

As previously noted, this research adopts an emic-etic perspective, positioning the researcher as both embedded within, and analytically distanced from, the research context. The researcher's positionality is particularly important in CDA, as interpretation is shaped by the researcher's location, professional background, and theoretical commitments. In this study, my prior experience in food education and food aid provides both insight and responsibility. This background enables a nuanced understanding of the institutional contexts, practices, and terminology that shape food literacy interventions and food aid provision. There is also capacity for greater sensitivity to the practical realities and constraints faced by both practitioners and participants.

Simultaneously, this positionality requires ongoing critical reflexivity. Familiarity with the field risks the normalisation of certain discourses or practices that warrant critical examination. To mitigate this, the analysis interrogates taken-for-granted assumptions within the existing understanding of food literacy, such as equitable access and availability, and explicitly grounds any interpretive claims in the data. In addition, the use of observational notes and images collected during fieldwork are used to support statements regarding context. Reflexivity is used to avoid presenting findings as wholly objective, universal truths. The resultant findings presented are therefore offered as critically informed interpretations. Importantly, CDA was applied with sensitivity to participants' lived experiences, recognising that critical analysis of discourse does not equate to a critique of individuals, but rather to a critique of the structural and discursive conditions within which those individuals are situated.

## **Chapter 5 – Conceptual Framework - Factors of Food Literacy in the presence of Food Insecurity**

Preceding chapters demonstrate that while food insecurity and food literacy are well-established fields, they remain theoretically disconnected. Existing frameworks are insufficient to account for the cultural, spatial, and relational processes through which food literacy is shaped and experienced within conditions of insecurity.

Building on the theoretical perspectives on poverty, social exclusion and food insecurity outlined in Chapter 3, and the critical review of food literacy in Chapter 2, this chapter moves from broad theoretical debates to a specific analytic model that organises both the empirical material and the subsequent discussion of its implications. As a bridging chapter, this discussion serves two key purposes. First, it consolidates and extends the theoretical work undertaken earlier in the thesis by articulating how concepts such as social exclusion, dignity and moral injury are embedded within the lived dynamics of food literacy and food insecurity. Second, it provides a clear map for the empirical chapters that follow: Chapter 6 develops the intrinsic and heuristic factors of the framework, Chapter 7 elaborates the extrinsic factors, and Chapter 8 examines extended food aid interventions as sites where these factors intersect in practice. By making these connections explicit, the chapter positions the conceptual framework as the organising device through which the subsequent analysis is interpreted and through which the contribution of this research is articulated.

### **5.1 The necessity for a conceptual Framework**

To address this gap, this research proposes a conceptual framework (Figure 12) that brings these strands together. This conceptual framework should be read as an emergent and integrative, developed iteratively through engagement with both existing literacy models and the empirical findings that will be presented in subsequent chapters.

For example, health literacy, from which food literacy is derived, comprises factors such as cognitive skills, social skills, motivation, and ability (Velardo, 2015); this introduces

the notion of empowerment into the conceptualisation of what it means to be health literate. Nutbeam (2000) also proposes a model of health literacy that offered three sequential levels: functional, interactive, and critical (Figure 7). Where some frameworks of food literacy could be critiqued as static, Slater et al. (2018) build on Nutbeam (2000) to include functional and interactive components of food literacy for youth transitioning into adulthood. Here, the model is equated to a ‘three-legged stool’ where it becomes dysfunctional should any element be removed; however, the authors also acknowledge that any form of food literacy will fail as *“an emancipatory health promotion tool when it is decontextualised from unjust societal processes such as social and health inequity and unhealthy food environments”* (Slater et al., 2018 p 554).

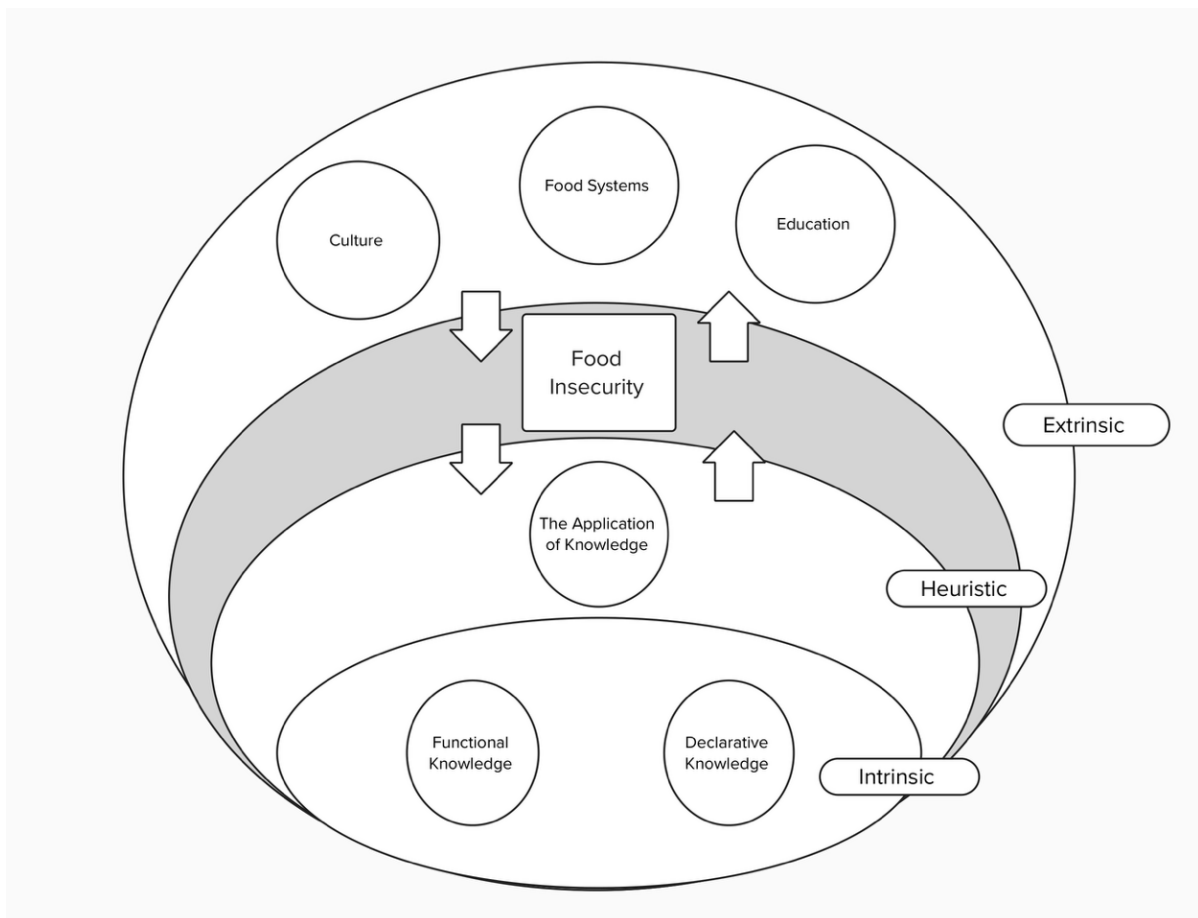


Figure 12: The factors of food literacy within the presence of food insecurity.

## 5.2 Defining new factors of food literacy

An explanation of how intrinsic, heuristic, and extrinsic factors are defined and differ from each other is necessary.

Intrinsic factors of food literacy consider acquired knowledge. It should be noted that these factors do not exist in isolation and, particularly within the context of food insecurity, also require dynamic interactions beyond self. However, fundamentally, intrinsic factors can be deemed the preserve of the individual where the absence of practice does not equate to an absence of ability. Intrinsic factors are stated as being the 'preserve' of an individual advisedly. When considering literacy as a set of skills or acquired knowledge it could be argued that once they are in the possession of an individual, they remain with the individual. This could be analogised in a similar way to language: we do not need to be constantly reading or speaking a language to be considered literate. In combination, and potentially individually, it is the presence of functional and declarative knowledge that contributes to self-efficacy and confidence.

Intrinsic factors can be sub-divided into functional and declarative knowledge. This division is necessary where either can be absent and therefore result in an individual being deemed not 'fully literate'. Functional knowledge is concerned with the procedures or process of food preparation whereas declarative knowledge considers the ability to identify foods, nutrition, and safety concerns of foods (Bublitz et al., 2011 cited in Silva et al., 2023).

Extrinsic factors are defined as being outside of the direct influence of the individual because they may be considered to be a result, outcome, or product of the application of intrinsic factors or they involve the process of how intrinsic factors are acquired, for

instance education. Whilst extrinsic, as the counter to intrinsic, can be taken to mean non-essential, within the context of this research, extrinsic may be better defined as not being ‘foundational’, especially where it could be construed that qualifying something as ‘non-essential’ could reinforce or exacerbate social exclusion; even more so within this context, where the absence of extrinsic factors could be interpreted as a form of relative poverty. Extrinsic factors of food literacy offer outcomes for the individual beyond satiating hunger and sustaining physical health; they also consider impacts at a community or population level. Cullen et al. (2015, p.144) acknowledge the necessity for such a holistic perspective: *“For an individual or population to be food literate and to fully engage in their food system, an ecological approach is necessary, in that individual behaviours and skills cannot be separated from their environmental or social context”*.

As noted, intrinsic factors require exchange with other parties. Some authors have suggested that skills such as budgeting fall under the umbrella of functional knowledge (Desjardins et al., 2013; Lawlis et al., 2019; Slater et al., 2018) however, particularly where the elasticity of household finance is insufficient to acquire the resources required, how food and other household items are provisioned requires more than financial acumen. Within this proposed framework, heuristic factors of food literacy include the application of knowledge, such as provisioning and sourcing, which are discussed within a third theme.

The term ‘Heuristic’ has been chosen where it reflects the use of decision-making strategies that individuals facing food insecurity employ to navigate complex and resource-constrained situations (Chen, 2016; Cohen and Babey, 2012). These behaviours are functional responses to the potential limitations introduced by food insecurity and, pertinently, bridge intrinsic and extrinsic factors. This theme explores how intrinsic factors are practised, demonstrated, and interlink within a food insecure context. This also mirrors previous research in which community food security has been defined as a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximises community self-reliance and social justice (Hamm and Bellows, 2003).

Crucially, the use of the term heuristic reflects the imperfect and often ‘making do’ nature of decisions that can be seen within the data collected within this research.

### **5.3 Food literacy as a systemic and relational process**

Within this novel presentation, it is the classification of heuristic factors, and the application of knowledge, that can be seen as a conduit between intrinsic and extrinsic factors to support better understanding of how experiences of food insecurity impact upon food literacy. Notably, this bridge is bi-directional; for instance, education, as an extrinsic factor, will influence the ability to demonstrate functional knowledge, or the ability to demonstrate functional knowledge will impact culture, etc. Food insecurity, as represented, becomes an impediment, blocking or slowing down the ‘travel’ between factors.

This proposed conceptual framework directly responds to Slater et al.(2018) and the acknowledgement that food literacy risks losing its emancipatory potential when abstracted from potentially unjust social processes. By explicitly situating food literacy within the structural and lived realities of food insecurity, the framework foregrounds the conditions that shape both the acquisition and application of food related knowledge. Rather than treating food literacy as an individualised or static capacity, the model reconceptualises food literacy as systemic.

This research has adopted a position of pragmatism, viewing knowledge as both tentative and changing (Creswell, 2009). Similarly, its social constructivist ontology values each experience as valid (Mackinnon et al., 2014). Whilst this has supported the categorisation of factors, *the extent* to which each factor is impacted within the presence of food insecurity cannot yet be presented within this model. However, this provides an area for further research with the potential for applicability in how future interventions and policy are informed.

The subsequent chapters will present and discuss the findings that have contributed to the development of this framework.

## Chapter 6 -Intrinsic and Heuristic factors of food literacy.

The chapter gathers and discusses the findings that make up the intrinsic and heuristic factors of food literacy as emergent from fieldwork data. Reflexive thematic and critical discourse analysis is drawn upon. This chapter responds to the overarching research question that asks how food insecurity and food literacy interlink within the context of extended food aid interventions. In so doing, it provides the foundational layers of the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 5. As stipulated with the research design, no data were collected within emergency only or referral based models, all findings presented in subsequent chapters are drawn exclusively from research conducted in EFAs.

As discussed within Chapter 2, literacy is terminology that is increasingly being used to describe the knowledge and skills needed to navigate a broad range of societal systems such as technology, finance, physical activity, health, and nutrition (Greene et al., 2003). Ergo, the proposition could be understood to be that increasing levels of food literacy increases the levels of resilience to experiences of food insecurity. However, the incidence of poorer health outcomes for those living in or at risk of poverty are also widely evidenced. *“Improving access to, and uptake of, high quality and nutritious food for citizens at risk of food insecurity is a pressing social challenge in the UK. Those who are forced to rely on food aid or low-cost foods have nutritionally poor diets which contribute to adverse health outcomes”* (Snow, 2024, p 4).

Given the inevitability that there will be heterogeneity within any group, when considering food literacy, this also means that there will also inevitably be a range of abilities and experiences. However, it is notable that there is a tendency to homogenise those experiencing poverty within the narrative that being poor equates to an absence of ability. This is particularly so within popular media which influences the narrative of the wider population (Bowen et al., 2019; Brooke, 2019; Doyle, 2014).

Where this research sits within a theoretical foundations that draws upon social exclusion theories of poverty and othering, themes emerging from the data regarding how food insecurity impacts the adoption and demonstration of functional knowledge include interpretations of what cooking is, how cookery may be viewed differently by different groups and how food agenda may influence the narrative around whether an individual can cook. Where intrinsic factors of food literacy can be separated into skills and knowledge, discussion within this chapter also examines declarative knowledge and the extent to which there may be an imperative for improved nutritional awareness at a population level. Finally, this chapter explores and questions how those experiencing food insecurity may require increased capacity to acquire a parity of health opportunities. This is presented within the subtheme of Heuristic factors and, specifically, the application of knowledge.

### **6.1- Sub-Theme 1: Functional knowledge**

This theme argues that cookery, as evidenced within the data provided by research participants, is an interpretative and context -driven practice. What counts as ‘cooking’ varies significantly depending on lived experiences and particularly by food insecurity which challenges that assumption that a lack of skill is the root issue.

The integrative overview of components of food literacy (Appendix A) identifies that functional knowledge i.e. the ability to prepare food is fundamental to food literacy (Block et al., 2011; Bublitz, 2011; Kolasa et al., 2001; Krause et al., 2018; Pendergast et al., 2011 cited in Cullen et al., 2015; Thomas and Irwin, 2011; Vidgen and Gallegos, 2014). The seminal definition of food literacy, as provided by Vidgen and Gallegos (2014) encompasses four domains: planning and managing, selecting, eating and, fundamentally, preparing. From the outset, this research has been premised around the exploration of what, if any, gaps concerning these functional skills exist. Therefore, all fieldwork began with a question around food practices (Appendices H and I ) that was

designed to elicit responses regarding whether there was a need for support with cookery skills and the reasons why.

Where the research sample is categorised into stakeholders and beneficiaries, and where the stakeholder category can be stratified into a variety of roles and responsibilities, the RTA process exposed a variety of differences of opinion between stratified groups based on role, but less so between other demographic factors such as age, gender, geography or location.

### **6.1.1 What is cooking?**

This component explores the potentially conflicted understanding of what constitutes cookery within the context of food aid interventions and those delivering and accessing them. It explores how those advocating the need for addressing skills gaps may be advocating cooking-based interventions and behaviour change that may be failing to accommodate the contextual circumstances in which the intended beneficiaries exist.

The analysis highlights that, whilst cookery can be interpreted in multiple ways, failure to recognise and accommodate these realities may serve to reinforce, rather than remedy, challenges to food justice.

Food literacy is multi-faceted and extends beyond fundamental cookery, but it is without question that cookery, in some form or another, is integral to an individual being deemed food literate. Many interventions reflect this and involve the dissemination of cookery skills. Typically, practitioners justify this by describing some form of skills gap amongst those accessing services:

*“I found we were getting a lot of food from FareShare, and unfortunately, people ...who were coming in had no idea. Some of them didn't know what that food was, didn't recognize what it was, had never used it, didn't know how to use it. ....Because we also noticed that people would literally go for ready-made meals rather than and it might be the cost of cooking might be a problem”.*

Food Pantry Manager – Participant 32

However, the validity of claims that there is a need for skills enhancement, as stated above, can be questioned where, even within the same statement, there is acknowledgement that the context of poverty introduces limitations on the ability to practice. This is a trend evident across the data where confusion and mixed messaging exist around the imperative for training targeting those experiencing food insecurity:

*“I mean, in certainly everyone in all my sessions, they definitely always learn something and like those mum’s that I recently taught, they do all cook, well not all of them, but most of them did cook”.*

Community Café Manager – Participant 25

Potentially, this may be attributable to interpretation of the process of food preparation and the fact that there may not actually be a consensus regarding what constitutes cookery. This ambiguity is reflective of existing research where organisations such as The National Food Alliance and Guild of Food Writers, alongside other celebrity proponents, have decried the loss of food education and promoted improved ability as a solution to a range of additional challenges including budgeting and health (Griffith et al., 2022) which is a position that could be countered by Lang and Caraher (2001) who state that the skills that whole cultures use to get food onto tables has significantly changed. The process of how functional knowledge is acquired, i.e. through formal or informal education, is considered and discussed as an extrinsic factor, however whether an individual, group, or community may be considered educated is called into question. These opinions are often expressed as value judgements over what food is consumed and how food is prepared which manifest in a narrative suggesting a lack of ability; where it may be more that the mechanisms of what food is acquired, and how it is prepared, is felt to be less than ideal and interpreted as not being able to cook.

On the whole, of those stakeholders interviewed, the most pragmatic responses regarding the necessity for interventions came from those with a more strategic perspective. This holistic view may be attributable to the role they fulfil compared to those working operationally. Responses suggested that whilst there may be a potential need for cookery classes, and therefore acknowledgement of some form of skills gap, the notion that the shortfall sat with a particular demographic was misplaced:

*“I think that what I feel less convinced of is that cooking classes for poor people is the answer. I think that the evidence is probably that we are all deskilled, whatever that means, in terms of being able to cook from basic ingredients”.*

Food Charity Trustee – Participant 58

Other stakeholders echoed these sentiments, and expanded, to suggest that, again, whilst there may be a skills deficit there was more complexity within the dialogue than the simple promotion of resilience building factors:

*“Actually, a lot of the time it’s our narrative. Our narrative is ‘you don’t know how to cook...you’ve got to eat this because you’re unhealthy you bad person, you’re unhealthy and then so on’. So, our narrative is one thing. I think there’s a negative narrative around food”.*

Public Health Commissioner – Participant 41

Reflexive thematic analysis further highlights the fact that disparate opinions exist surrounding a demonstrable need for intrinsic food literacy interventions. If, as the National Food Alliance (Griffith et al., 2022), Guild of food writers, and other high-profile individuals propose, a level of deskilling exists amongst the population as a whole, shortfalls are not the preserve of those experiencing food insecurity, nor are they *caused* by it. Nonetheless, there remains throughout the data a prominent dialogue surrounding the extent to which the food choices and skillsets of those accessing food aid interventions are unacceptable. An absence of functional skills may no longer inhibit the ability to support household food provision (Lang and Caraher, 2001). The way that food is acquired, prepared and consumed, as a society, has changed with technological advances in both food production and home preparation, such as the use of the microwave, which could therefore call into question the usefulness of ‘traditional’ methods within real world contexts. However, the well-documented inequalities in health outcomes and life expectancy between those in the highest and lowest income deciles (The Health Foundation, 2024) cannot be ignored either. Indeed, these disparities were highlighted at an operational level during fieldwork:

*“It’s clear that the north and the south of the borough is completely different. So, one side is affluent, one isn’t. There’s actually a ten-year age difference, life expectancy difference between \*\*\*\*\* and \*\*\*\*\* , just up the road from each other”.*

Within the time period that this research has been undertaken, there has been a groundswell of opinion suggesting that a diet high in ultra processed foods will have significant negative health impacts. The UK Government Office for Science defines Ultra Processed Foods (UPFs) loosely as products that typically contain large numbers of ingredients produced commercially, rather than domestically, and involving production methods that are not achievable during home preparation (Government office for science, 2024). Similarly, UPFs tend towards higher levels of salt, sugar, and saturated fat which are widely evidenced as having detrimental health impacts. Taking this information into consideration, there is perhaps more clarity surrounding the imperative to move towards a diet that minimises the consumption of products that are detrimental to health. However, again, this is an issue that is stratified and requires action across the population.

Across the research data, and within the narrative that there is a lack of functional food knowledge and a need for intervention around skills, frequent value judgements are evidenced over what food is currently being prepared or consumed. Frequently, references were made by interviewees to the levels of pre-prepared, frozen, microwaved, and take-away food consumed:

*“I tend to find that a lot of people that come to our food bank are lazy when it comes to preparing food. They would rather grab a pizza out of the freezer or the beans and sausages off the shelf”.*

The quote above holds significance where it exemplifies the contradictions that exist across the sector where judgements are being made by stakeholders about the choices made by beneficiaries. Firstly, where these choices are reflective of those increasingly being made across social strata. Secondly, and particularly demonstrative of othering and stigmatising, where these products tend to be those that are proactively chosen by the same stakeholders to create supply. This othering and stigmatisation are exemplified by the following quotes which have been extracted from the same interview:

*“...tried all different, different various things. Tried fresh fruit, tried fresh vegetables, and they rotted, right... which is a shame”.*

*“Various different organisations that I’ve managed to convince to help us out here and there...I have Kentucky Fried Chicken, a weekly mountain of Kentucky Fried Chicken”.*

*“I get the cheapest. Everything I get is the cheapest... I mean we buy frozen stuff, we get pizzas, toad in the holes and spaghetti Bolognese from Tesco. So, they’re all under a pound. I don’t suppose they’ve got the greatest nutritional value, but it will stop you from starving”.*

Food Pantry Volunteer – Participant 44



Figure 13: Representative stock within food pantries.



Figure 14: Representative stock within food pantries



Figure 15: Representative stock within food pantries

The nature of products available in this particular setting was reflective of the products in most settings visited during fieldwork. Previous research of food aid, whether operating as a food bank or as higher agency interventions, indicates that achieving

consistent nutritional standards was problematic and created challenges for those accessing to maintain a nutritionally balanced diet (Oldroyd et al., 2022; Simmet et al., 2017). How much stakeholders are simply meeting beneficiary demand may be questioned, but consideration is also required of the physical or economic circumstances that may forcing beneficiaries into having little other choice and therefore necessitating actions to be taken that are the result of circumstances beyond the control of the individual. Potentially, the contextual circumstances surrounding the preparation of food may be influencing decision making as much any presence of functional knowledge, Similarly, the extent to which declarative knowledge may be able to be applied.



Figure 16: Stock availability within pantries limits the demonstration of declarative skills



Figure 17: Stock availability within pantries limits the demonstration of declarative skills

For example, the circumstances relating to a parent housed in temporary housing were discussed within a focus group of food pantry staff. The family was living in one room and sharing bathroom and kitchen facilities with strangers. Were any fresh food be placed in the fridge it would often be taken, choices were therefore restricted and based on whether the food could be eaten straight away or stored safely at room temperature in the bedroom. Demonstrably, functional knowledge, including food safety considerations, was precluded from being demonstrated by the context.

In another instance, the interviewee demonstrated an understanding of the fact the food choices may not be the best whilst simultaneously acknowledging the personal or systemic barriers that may be forcing those decisions to be made:

*“Honestly, a lot of people my age don’t have the best relationship with food, more so because of the upbringing. I feel like a lot of people stick to the basics, chicken nuggets, chicken dippers, alphabet shapes, stuff like that”.*

Community Café Volunteer – Participant 26

Drawing upon critical discourse analysis, where the language used may be open to interpretation when considering the circumstances in which the interview was conducted, the use of the word ‘upbringing’ is significant. Upbringing suggests surroundings, the way that individuals may have been supported or failed by other

individuals and agencies, decisions made that were influenced by what one beneficiary described as ‘the poverty of their environment’.

Both stakeholders and beneficiaries commonly criticised the proponents of scratch cooking for their lack of contextual understanding and ignorance around the circumstances in which those targeted lived. Frequently, the challenges around the preparation of food were cited, rather than the inability to prepare. Again, the complexity that poverty and food insecurity introduce into the lives of those experiencing it was cited as a barrier to practice:

*“Things like Jamie Oliver showing how to cook things that need to be laborious. You don’t have to be in the kitchen for hours, buying food that eats into utilities. You’re not going to put the oven on for one jacket potato”.*

Food Pantry Customer – Participant 21

Whilst what constitutes and defines cookery may be interpretive, the data within this research indicates that, in the most part, ‘cooking’ is taken to mean ‘from scratch’. The nature of the foods being selected by beneficiaries have been shown to be subject to value judgements by stakeholders. This reintroduces the question of the validity of the narrative that interventions directly targeting functional skills are required, particularly where interpretations of ‘what cooking is’ are subjective. Previous research exploring perceptions of what cooking is, such as Wolfson et al. (2016), found that perceptions varied considerably, Cooking existed on a continuum with responses incorporating considerations of whether or how food was heated, the degree of time, effort and love involved and, significantly, if convenience foods were used. This was found to be consistent across the research sample regardless of location, affluence or food security. Similar, narratives exist within this data where it is also evident that judgements also extend to the processes employed to create meals. However, whilst the inequity of health outcomes between those living with poverty and those who are not could be attributed to diet related behaviours and decisions, responses within this research indicate that many of those delivering interventions perhaps do not consider the realities of those who are food insecure as well as they could do. This, ultimately, could be described as reinforcing inequities:

*“If you're already feeling a bit insecure and wobbly, you got somebody having a go at you about cooking, what's that?”*

Public Health Commissioner – Participant 41

The way in which motivations for cooking diverge across populations reveals that interventions may fail if they overlook whether cooking is a survival strategy or an act to be enjoyed. Disconnections between the intended purpose and lived experience can reduce the relevance of the intervention for the intended audience. For example, when discussing the potential impacts of cookery interventions, another interviewee also indicated a lack of contextual understanding. That the use of technology for example, despite its potential, is often eschewed for basic skills:

*“And it does talk about the microwave being a certain set of skills ....(but) so often when we think about cooking skills, we think about knife skills, really. We're actually talking about knife skills, aren't we?”*

Food Charity Trustee – Participant 58

There is little argument against supporting the dissemination of fundamental skills, such as the ability to peel and chop, where gaps exist. However, improving knife skills actually does little to support with the development of strategies that mitigate the impacts of the context in which those targeted by these interventions may find themselves.

### **6.1.2 Cooking for pleasure or necessity**

Building on the previous component's interrogation of what constitutes cookery, it is also necessary to examine the further meanings and motivations behind it. Where the previous component highlighted how interpretations of what cookery *is* can vary considerably, this component explores the emotional and functional imperatives that underpin *why* people may cook. Using this lens, exploration takes place around whether there may be a (dis)connection between interventions and their intended audiences, whether imperatives for cooking may be perceived as top down and irrelevant, and the extent to which interventions may be seen as empowering or potentially, may be a means

of reinforcing disengagement based on a misalignment between stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Whether you ‘eat to live’ or ‘live to eat’ may be considered overly simplistic terminology where it does not accommodate nuance but, within the data, there was evidence to suggest that, potentially, different groups value food differently. The associated social and cultural components of food literacy are identified as sitting within the separate theme of extrinsic factors and may be considered consequential of having, or not having, sufficient access to appropriate quantities and quality of food. Nonetheless, the fieldwork exposed differing opinions surrounding the nature of how cooking may be considered a necessity that is simply about getting food onto a table or whether it may be described as a pastime to be enjoyed:

*“It’s because you’ve got to do it. If you’ve got the time to do it and you’ve not got kids hanging off you, it’s quite nice to do”.*

Regional EFAI Coordinator – Participant 42

The first phase of research consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted with practitioners and volunteers in two extended food aid interventions. Data acquired within this exposed distance between how valued a highly publicised, celebrity endorsed scratch cookery intervention was by its proponents and by its intended audience. Jamie Oliver’s Ministry of Food was established in Rotherham, West Yorkshire with the intention of imparting cookery skills to adults primarily from low socio-economic backgrounds. However, unsolicited responses made by those interviewed within the area, when exploring the imperative for interventions, cited the project and indicated that the perceived lack of culinary literacy was a problem for those ‘looking in’ from outside of the community rather than it being an issue for those within it:

*“no-one asked us if we wanted or needed it”.*

Food Pantry Manager - Participant 14

Where the health inequities associated with socio-economic status are widely evidenced, there is a pressing need for action. Successful interventions should be

measured by tangible change and adoption of the desired behaviour change (Lee et al., 2021) whereas a raising of public awareness, attitudes, or intention, whilst laudable, may be perceived as an insufficient outcome.

In epidemics, which the prevalence of health inequalities could be termed, it is not only the content of the message that matters, but also the messenger. Long term success hinges upon winning the hearts and minds of the population of interest. Post democratic theory suggests environments are within the control of a socio-economic elite rather than, as is perceived, the electorate (Dibb and Carrigan, 2013, Gladwell 2015). The use of a celebrity to promote charitable causes is often effective at raising public awareness but, simultaneously, the ‘white-saviour complex’ can be perceived as vain, insincere and purely for self-interest (Saint, 2019). In this context, the celebrity proponent can be seen as part of the elite and therefore not working in the interests of the beneficiary at all (Brockington and Henson, 2015). Oliver, himself, was once quoted as saying his push to improve nutrition did not work because eating well was still seen as a posh and middle-class concern (Rose et al., 2019). How much was cookery, and to an extent the status of those promoting it, therefore incongruous with the wants and needs of the community of interest and therefore unrelatable? The prevalence of food and cooking shows sitting within what could be described as mainstream entertainment, as opposed to the more didactic educational outputs of before, has potentially changed how the process of food preparation is perceived and valued between groups (Caraher et al., 2000).

Beneficiaries were asked about their opinions on TV chefs and cooking within the media. Where initial respondents had suggested that the ministry of food campaign had misread the perceived need of beneficiaries for cookery interventions, how much of this was attributable to lesser importance being placed on the processes or the ingredients used? The data suggests that an impact of food insecurity is that a predisposition towards volume exists, potentially in lieu of quality. Similarly, where the ability to draw upon resources for experimentation or using utilities unnecessarily becomes a limitation, is cookery achieving anything beyond the physiological need to satiate hunger out of reach or unrealistic? This sacrificing of quality, quantity, and taste of food is a phenomenon of

food insecurity highlighted by Hunter et al. (2025) who suggest that economic insecurity introduces forms of bargaining that necessitate conflicted decision making.

In general, participants felt that the food presented in the media was unrelatable:

*“(It’s not) something you would do, especially when you’re hungry as well...and a bit of a parsnip thing. The meats like that and if someone came over and handed me a potato like that, I can’t see that filling you up”.*

Cookery Class Attendee – Participant 35

However, respondents also suggested that the approach of other celebrity chefs had more appeal where they reflected the way they cooked at home:

*“I get all the sauces out, red sauce, brown sauce, Worcester sauce and it’s all going in the pan with the mince meats and tins....I like the Hairy Bikers... the way they cook to me is like we’ve got in our cupboards, you know what I mean?”*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 35

This notion of relatability was reflected within discussions with some stakeholders that had delivered practical skills interventions as part of extended food aid interventions. Within this setting various models had been implemented with varying degrees of success:

*“We had a lady come in to do a demonstration last week, did it really, really well but people didn’t engage, and my reflection is that it’s somebody outside.... I think also ‘bean and kale’ it had a really posh moment”.*

Community Chaplain / EFAI Coordinator - Participant 29

The use of the word ‘posh’ indicates a degree of separation that is, arguably, reflective of an ambivalence towards the promotion of food agenda beyond what is truly functional and that such work is striving to move audiences in the direction of food choices beyond what may be achievable, or it may be perceived as unrealistic.

Generally, respondents suggested that the most successful interventions were those that were built upon trust that had been earned over a protracted period of time, the

practice of ‘parachuting’ another thing into a community was regarded negatively and at an increased risk of failure. Franks et al. (2012) found that the most effective behaviour change interventions evolve in partnership with local communities and must reflect local need and context. Where representations of food in the media were considered to be unrelatable, this carried through to food that was promoted within interventions. An alternative perspective could be that the nature of the food needs to be relatable to the target audience, both in terms of component ingredients used and how it may be replicated:

*“\*\*\*\* has a really good one. We call it ‘unexpected item in the bagging area’ and it was a cookery thing where literally on the day we would look to see what we had....this is just how I do my cooking at home. People chipped in ...it really became actually people teaching one another ... I think that was the difference”.*

Vicar / EFAI Project Coordinator - Participant 28

Other courses and interventions were delivered with what could be deemed to be more generalist agenda i.e. there was a simple teaching to cook or serving prepared food narrative. Whilst there was more applicability towards those targeted, for instance produce acquired from food rescue was utilised as much as possible within the offering, even within these settings some content may have been limited in its efficacy:

*“Bread and butter from scratch, so literally all the yeast, we got double cream and whipped it till it became butter and all that”.*

Cookery Class Leader - Participant 56

A critique levelled at cookery interventions generally is that the self-referral recruitment mechanism tends to attract participants that already have a predisposition towards cookery. In terms of facilitating behaviour change they are limited on the basis that those who would most benefit from the intervention tend not to become participants (Adams et al., 2011). From the extended interventions that included cookery demonstrations and lessons within this research, similar conclusions can be made. In multiple instances, references were made to the fact that participants could be deemed as already having fundamental functional food literacy, oftentimes it appeared that participants were not

necessarily looking to acquire basic skills per se, but to extend or expand upon abilities or increase repertoires:

*“I know that one lady definitely liked to cook. However, the air fryer was the barrier. She said, I’ve had one for months, I’m just scared to use it”.*

Cookery Class Leader - Participant 56

However, where extrinsic factors of food literacy such as reciprocity, social connections and association with food culture may be limited by food insecurity, there may be a wider role for extended food aid interventions beyond teaching intrinsic factors. This was acknowledged by practitioners and evidenced in recruitment materials (Fig 18). This wider role, situated within the extrinsic factor of culture, will be discussed within the next chapter.

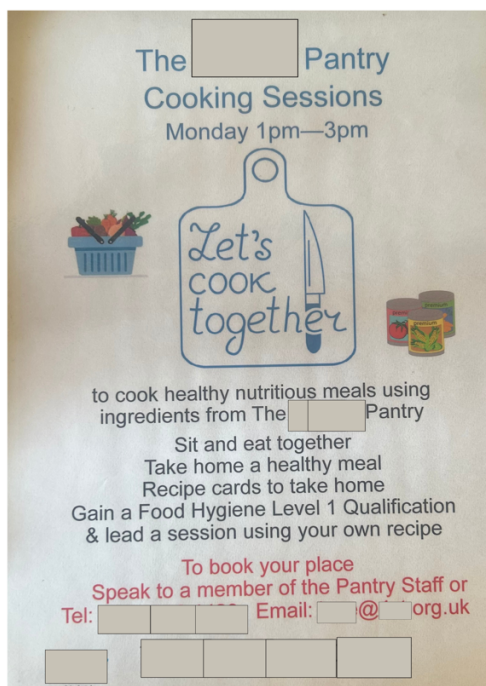


Figure 18: Examples of a food literacy intervention recruitment posters.

What this component exposes is that there is inconclusivity surrounding a definition of what cookery as factor of food literacy is. What constitutes real cooking differs according

to who is asked and under what circumstances. Responses within the data put forward a narrative of skills deficit without adequate consideration of the reasons why. What emerges from the data is that practice is often constrained by structural, rather than behavioural, limitations. A lack of space, equipment, time, or control over one's own environment inhibits the application of knowledge regardless of whether it exists or not. Where interventions focus on perceptions of 'proper' cooking it reinforces a framing that people in poverty are lacking or failing rather than, potentially, exercising resourcefulness. Failing to acknowledge that contextual circumstances influence decisions and actions as much as personal choice risks reinforcing othering and potentially contributes to further stigmatisation.

The emphasis on knife-skills and scratch cooking, for example, may not consider practical realities and represents a narrow definition of what cooking may be. Whilst functional skills do matter, there also needs to be a broader understanding of what is feasible within an individual's specific circumstances.

### **6.1.3 Food agenda and applicability**

This final component concerning the functional knowledge factor of food literacy examines the influence of organisational priorities and broader food policy narratives on how food aid interventions are designed and delivered. In doing so, questions are raised regarding the extent to which activities intended to support those experiencing food insecurity are, in practice, shaped more by the people delivering them than the lived realities and needs of those they are set up to serve. Where this research draws from theoretical perspectives of cultural hegemony and, specifically, being the subject of interest whilst simultaneously being invisible, these questions ask whether pre-existing food agenda impede or support the alleviation of food insecurity.

In 2025, The Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance announced within its annual conference a strategic shift within its approach to addressing food inequalities within the city, which itself has a twelve-year difference in life expectancy between the least and most affluent

(BBC, 2025). At the core of this transition, it was stated, was the notion of delivering *with* the community and moving away from delivering interventions *to* the community. The latter approach was evident in much of the interventions participating within the research undertaken for this thesis. Whilst in no way overtly detrimental to those targeted, several projects were delivered by organisations with an overarching agenda that extended beyond the addressing of food insecurity. This may have been an environmental focus, such as reducing avoidable food waste or encouraging plant-based diets, but also offshoots of other projects such as supporting military veterans. Many EFAls were run in and by churches as part of outreach work.

Interview responses suggested that the promotion of wider food agenda was misplaced and risked switching off targeted audiences:

*“Potentially, the agenda of plant based and healthy eating or whatever. It’s great but it’s not necessarily the best place when you’re using food insecurity as a jumping off point. I think you’ve got to build up to those things it’s like OK to put beans in things, but you’ve got to ease people in”.*

Community Chaplain / EFAI Coordinator - Participant 29

Instances arose where interventions, whilst having their own individual benefits, could be interpreted as confused, lacking in applicability, and representative of this:

*“So, with our arts and health workshop we have been working with \*\*\*\*\*, and we make a soup with them, showing them how to make a seasoned soup that’s full of nutrition and then we sit down, and we’ve been making mandalas using similar ingredients that we’ve used in the soup, dried stuff and lentils”.*

Food Project Director – Participant 17

Whilst most cookery interventions utilised some form of face-to-face instruction, there were others that chose to facilitate cooking in the home environment. Many of these interventions were a pivot introduced during the restrictions of the coronavirus pandemic utilising Zoom video calling and other software to interact online. Whilst lockdown restrictions had been lifted when this fieldwork took place, some practitioners were constrained by operational and logistical challenges and continued to deliver sessions online. Respondents indicated that successful delivery of interventions would require

significant resource allocation for planning and preparation whilst securing appropriate venues present a constant challenge. In one instance, for example, local authority licensing precluded the use of the setting for any form of cookery which required significant adjustment to facilitate the delivery of practical interventions. Often, turn out for courses would be low or would have high drop off rates across the weeks that sessions would be running. This was reflective of the questionable efficacy noted within the systematic review of interventions undertaken D) with many having attrition rates of over 50% (Flego et al., 2014; Garcia et al., 2014; Orr and McCamley, 2017; West et al., 2020). Practitioners would commonly cite the fact that interventions were free or incurred no-cost to participate meant that there was little in the way of disincentive to not turn up. However, literature suggests that barriers to initial and continued attendance actually reflects the stressors introduced by socio-economic inequalities such as inconvenient hours, transportation issues, competing demands on time as well as physical limitations such as medical conditions (Kelleher et al., 2016; Varela et al., 2022; Zack et al., 2022).

However, it should also be noted that low uptake and engagement of interventions could be attributed to the conflicting agenda between those delivering and those targeted. This was a frustration demonstrated by a local authority commissioner:

*“We just wanted to try something that offers food education without requiring people to come together to a class, because we've done a lot of that. And sometimes it works really, really well, but sometimes attendance is atrocious and sometimes we have parents there who we can't get off their phones to actually engage in the class and we become some sort of weird food based creche”.*

Local Authority Commissioner - Participant 39

Research into commercially available recipe boxes (Fraser et al., 2024; Sumpter et al., 2025; Vos et al., 2024) indicates that mitigating barriers to cookery, such as the time taken required to plan and shop as well as other potential stressors associated with food provisioning, can increase the amount of scratch cooking undertaken. Their increased uptake should be considered indicative of the barriers to the demonstration of culinary literacy experienced across all population strata, but it should be noted that the price of these products generally renders them unattainable for lower income households.

However, it is questionable in some instances where interventions and local authorities had replicated such recipe kits but were targeting low-income households whether these were primarily being used to increase the opportunity to practice skills or rather to promote overarching environmental and sustainable food agenda:

*“And we did a project with \*\*\*\*\*, where they put together recipe kits. ... We had teams of people who put together the kits and that for some people, it did make them try things they wouldn't have tried before, and they found they liked them. Other people wouldn't touch a chickpea. Do you know what I mean? It doesn't matter that it's real, but it was interesting”.*

Food Pantry Director - Participant 49

Environmental and sustainable food choices are considered to be extrinsic factors of food literacy by multiple authors (Krause et al., 2018; Slater et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2019; Truman and Elliot, 2019), and in the instance of the intervention above the recipe kits were delivered as part of a food pantry run by a group with an overt sustainable food agenda. This introduces two potential limitations that call the perceived success of the intervention into question. Firstly, as with some of the identified interventions within the systematic review assessing the effectiveness of cookery interventions (Appendix D), trying and liking a food is an inadequate measure of a sustained behaviour change, such as incorporating plant-based foods into the diet, in the long term. Secondly, and more pertinently given the potential vulnerability of the target audience, how much uptake is a voluntary decision may be called into question when scarcity may lead to the acceptance of whatever produce is available.

The Household Support Fund is aimed at anyone who may be vulnerable or cannot pay for essentials, regardless of whether those accessing are in receipt of benefits. As of April 2025, £724 million was made available to councils and local authorities by central government with a primary objective of providing crisis support and a secondary objective of providing preventative support (West Sussex County Council, 2025). In line with many of the funds introduced in response to the cost-of-living crisis, this funding was not open-ended and, in line with the Localism Act, 2012 (The National Archives, 2025), was to be used at the discretion of the local authority. Where

respondents suggested that the precarity of the funding presented challenges around establishing interventions that could be sustainable in the longer term, Local Authorities would issue payment cards (HSVs) to families that could be used to ‘top-up’ household food provisions.

Whilst vouchers offer a crucial lifeline they are not without challenge such as restrictions around where they can and cannot be used, limited availability and accessibility, and the associated stigma of accessing can deter some of those entitled from applying (Sustain, 2024). In particular, where some communities would access markets and independent traders, either for preference or because that was all that would be available, many found that HSVs were unredeemable at the retailers usually accessed.

One stakeholder related that HSVs were being misused within their local authority:

*“We had anecdotal feedback. You're never sure how true it is, but whenever we would pop into Morrison, if there was a query with a voucher, the ladies on the customer service desk would always say to us, you do know people are using these to buy magazines and sweets and cigarettes and, you know, bits and pieces like that, maybe”.*

*Local Authority Commissioner - Participant 48*

Where the Local Authority had discretion over how funding was spent it was decided that money should be spent on the delivery of fruit and vegetable boxes sent to households instead. These boxes, assembled and distributed using third party private companies, provided enough ingredients for around five family meals:

*“They're not plant based because we're pushing a plant-based diet ... but they don't eat enough fruit and veg, and it means DPD can lob it at the front door any time of the day”.*

*Local Authority Commissioner - Participant 39*

There are questions to be asked regarding the lack of agency afforded to families entitled to household support funding by a pivot to an intervention that removes choice based on an apparent lack of engagement and anecdotal feedback. Even more so where the mechanism of intervention that has been introduced offers less value to the end beneficiary through the introduction of longer supply chains. Research has indicated that universal voucher schemes can fail to accommodate regional idiosyncrasies, such as a

lack of participating retailers. Others, such as the Fresh Street programme (Relton et al., 2025) indicate, through the use of paper sharable vouchers, increased exposure to healthy food prompts, reduced food insecurity, and improved dietary habits. Is it therefore acceptable to suggest that HSVs are being abused or are they simply being used in ways other than which they were originally intended? Demonstrably, providing a quantity of ingredients to support meal provision is alleviating the symptoms of food insecurity but does little to address the root causes. Relton et al. (2025) highlight that there is a need for effective and cost-effective interventions that increase fruit and vegetable intake and support a transition towards healthier choices, particularly in areas of higher deprivation. However, it could be argued that this is representative of the local authority agenda being 'forced' onto an underserved community with little in the way of agency for the beneficiary.

This sub-theme illustrates how food literacy interventions can become distorted when they serve the agenda of the provider more than the needs of the intended beneficiary. Whilst projects may be well intentioned, when they prioritise environmental messaging, cost-efficiencies, or assumptions about poor decision making they risk disengagement, alienation, and potentially harm. Across the research data there is a clear thread that evidences tensions between intent and impact; in essence where organisational objectives override contextual realities and lived experience.

The removal of choice is problematic whether through predefined recipe kits that support an organisational aim or the withdrawal of entitlement to voucher schemes. This not only limits the opportunity to apply pre-existing food literacy but reinforces a dynamic in which those experiencing food insecurity are positioned as passive recipients of help. This can be interpreted as limiting agency and therefore diminishing dignity.

#### **6.1.4 Conclusion to functional knowledge sub-theme**

Findings and discussion surrounding this first sub-theme of intrinsic factors of food literacy have evidenced the complex, and frequently contradictory, ways in which

cooking is defined and therefore how it informs narratives around whether or not an actual skills deficit exists. This has also evidenced how the motivations for interventions targeting food insecure populations may be misplaced.

In the first instance, it was shown that context shapes how cooking is defined differently between groups; therefore, the imperative for skills-based interventions can be questioned. A lack of opportunity being misinterpreted as a lack of ability formed inappropriate scaffolding on which the justification for interventions were formed. Opportunities were shown to be impeded by structural and socio-economic constraints.

A tension between practitioners and intended beneficiaries has been highlighted; in particular where scratch cooking agendas, whilst well intentioned, frequently felt alien to those they aimed to serve. These were either perceived as 'posh and impractical' or irrelevant to those for whom satiating hunger was the primary purpose. To this end, behaviours utilising convenience such as microwaved meals, frozen produce, or ready to eat foods is shown as often being dismissed as laziness rather than as an adaptive response to real world limitations.

Ultimately, this sub-theme has shown that enhancing functional food literacy, whilst being of no detriment, cannot be extricated from context. There is a necessity to recognise resource constraints, failure to do so risks perpetuating stigma. Particularly where interventions perceived as supportive may be removing agency and choice.

## **6.2 Sub-Theme 2: Declarative knowledge**

This sub-theme explores the potential misconceptions surrounding nutritional knowledge within the context of food literacy interventions. Importantly, it examines how both those delivering and those accessing support may hold incomplete or inaccurate interpretations of what constitutes a healthy diet. The research data reveals a level of confusion around key nutritional messages and discussion considers how these

misconceptions, particularly when compounded by systemic barriers to food access, may inadvertently increase stigmatisation and unnecessary vilification for decision making misinterpreted as unsatisfactory.

The discussions on functional knowledge and interpretations of what may be perceived as cookery and how it is valued, particularly within the context of disenfranchised communities, questioned the extent to which the narrative that there is an absence of functional knowledge can be considered valid. However, for clarity, this research is not questioning the importance and long-term benefits of acquiring and consuming a healthy balanced diet. Where functional knowledge considers the demonstrable, physical skills required to get food onto a table, declarative knowledge is more concerned with understanding (Bublitz et al., 2011). Considerations include nutrition and the components of a healthy diet.

The social constructivist approach of this research ensured that interviews, focus groups, and conversations were guided, as much as possible, by the participant and what they felt to be important. Amongst beneficiaries, there was considerably less reference to, and less animated conversation surrounding declarative knowledge than was afforded to the area of functional knowledge. This could be considered indicative or symptomatic of the imperative for simply acquiring enough food, particularly where volume may be given priority over the potential health impacts of what is consumed. Ranjit et al. (2020), for example, state that food insecure households have notably unhealthier diet profiles with factors such as less reading of food labels and other precursors to healthy decisions and procurement practice than food secure households. Other hypotheses concerning food insecurity and poor diet attribute a substitution effect where more nutrient rich and less energy dense foods are replaced with those that have a tendency towards higher carbohydrate and fat contents (Morales and Berkowitz, 2016) which will increase satiety but at the expense of health.

However, it was within stakeholder responses that more emphasis was given to the nutritional value of the food choices made by those accessing services. Arguably, this is to be expected given how many of the projects are associated with Public Health in some

way and correlates with the stronger imperative of this group to implement community behaviour change programmes.

### **6.2.1 Challenges around knowledge acquisition and application**

The aim of this component is to explore how inconsistency in the level of declarative knowledge within the research population, often shaped by dominant narratives over what constitutes healthy eating, can potentially exacerbate marginalisation and social exclusion.

Notably, amongst many of the research participants there was evidence of less overt knowledge of what could empirically be considered to be a healthy diet. However, as with functional knowledge, this also does not extend to a level of complete ignorance. Similarly, there was a suggestion that gaps in knowledge were not exclusively within one particular demographic, and they existed across the stratified research sample.

To illustrate, the ‘5 a day’ campaign was introduced in 2003 to encourage the consumption of five portions of fruit and vegetables a day as part of a healthy lifestyle (The Health Foundation, 2003). Whilst how well this is understood at a population level in practice is questionable (Rooney et al. 2017), as an example of a health campaign that has been successfully embedded into the public consciousness the 5 a day message is demonstrably hugely successful. The understanding of the importance of fruit and vegetables was evidenced across the entire research population:

*“In some places, there’ll be a bit of surplus from supermarkets. In some places, there’s fresh fruit and veg partnerships with local suppliers. But then in a lot of places, we’re buying in stock”.*

Social Supermarket Trustee - Participant 52

Similar responses were noted at a beneficiary level:

*“I eat more healthier... fruits, vegetables, less bread... don’t get a lot of frozen stuff”.*

Community Café Customer - Participant 3

Chapter one referenced statistics that around 50% of the UK population's household budgets are insufficient to offer affordability of the Public Health Eatwell Guide (Scott et al., 2018). Clearly, fruit and vegetables are components of a healthy and nutritious diet but this predisposition towards fresh could be introducing a level of unnecessary confusion. In fact, Public Health England recommends five a day in five different ways i.e. fresh, frozen, dried, tinned or juiced (NHS, 2022). Not consuming any fruit and vegetables would clearly be an area of concern for which the reasons should be considered i.e. is this a personal choice or attributable to food insecurity. However, it is also concerning that a degree of misunderstanding is potentially demonising individuals unnecessarily; that the decisions being taken are not as negative as they may initially be perceived to be. This becomes even more problematic when those in positions of authority appear to be equally misinformed. Where marginalised communities may be subject to additional resourcing challenges, such as unavailability or inaccessibility, there is an increased need for culturally, linguistically, and accessible pathways that manage disinformation and promote equity (Silva et al., 2023):

*“Yeah, that thing though. The food that’s not good for you is cheaper than the food that’s good for you. And if you can’t access fresh fruit and vegetables.... then you’re pretty stuffed. But the other part of it is actually it’s cheaper for me to go and buy a bag of frozen mixed veg than the components of frozen mixed veg. Whether I know how to cook it or not, it’s cheaper for me to do that, and that’s not right”*

Local Authority Commissioner - Participant 48

Where responses did begin to explore or reference macro nutrients, such as protein, carbohydrates and fats, it was evident that similar levels of confusion existed. The Public Health Eatwell guide (GOV.UK, 2024) currently recommends that meals be based on starchy foods, preferably wholegrain varieties, such as rice, pasta, and potatoes. Recommendations suggest that wholegrain carbohydrates, for example, keep people feeling fuller for longer, are more slowly digested which supports the regulation of blood sugar levels whilst also being the least calorie dense of the macro food groups. However, when asked how experiencing food insecurity might be impacting the nature of the foods they consume, respondents expressed feelings of guilt based on incorrect information:

*“Noodles are excellent, rice, pasta, yeah I know it’s very starchy and I have a lot of starch in my diet and that’s why my cholesterol’s gone sky (high)”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 34

In response to the same question, oftentimes eating healthier was simply equated with cooking from scratch as opposed to using pre-prepared foods. Conversely, the implication that scratch cooking was a healthy behaviour could be negated with the evidencing of a range of dishes that could just as easily have been high in saturated fat, salt, and sugar, or be utilising ultra processed foods where component ingredients may be from jars and packets. Similarly, the quantity of these foods was considered important to respondents; the notion being that a plated meal, regardless of how it is prepared, may be healthier than food that is grazed. This could also be considered reflective of how foods are chosen for volume and the ability to satiate hunger over foods that offer nutrition:

*“Like proper home cooked meals, shepherd’s pie, chicken casserole, ...fajitas like anything bulky and actually, like, substantial”.*

Community Café Volunteer – Participant 26

However, it should be noted that whilst grazing foods increase the potential for excessive calorie consumption, how food is plated also impacts its perceived nutritional value which may create a false impression of how healthy the consumer is being (Wadhwa and Capaldi-Phillips, 2014; Zellner et al., 2014) and, when considering health inequalities, it is the type of food consumed and how it is prepared that is the primary determinant and not how the food is consumed.

What the findings within this component display is that adequate declarative knowledge is not something that is universal, but neither is it entirely lacking. Individuals across the sample showed an awareness of health-related messages, such as the importance of fruit and vegetables, but the practical application of this knowledge was frequently partial or mis-informed. It should be noted that is a finding reflected across the research

sample and therefore should not be considered uniquely associated with food insecurity.

However, the data also reveals potential marginalisation and stigmatisation of those accessing food interventions based on narratives of what healthy eating looks like. For example, the widespread association with fresh produce as healthier and the disregard of alternatives such as frozen or tinned produce. Food choices constrained by affordability, access, and circumstance often include the latter, but data shows that this legitimate practice is misunderstood by practitioners; those accessing find themselves labelled as having inadequate diets unnecessarily. Similarly, the guilt and self-blame expressed by beneficiaries over dietary choices, as referenced within the data, aligns with the framing of poverty as a process of stigmatisation (Lister, 2006).

Where behaviours, including food practices, are subject to moral judgement this could be seen to exacerbating the cycle of social exclusion. Social Exclusion theory indicates that a society that sets standards without equipping or enabling all of its members to meet them is complicit in the reproduction of inequality (Levitas, 2005). Demonstrably, there are gaps within declarative knowledge at a population level that could be interpreted as a failing system lacking in clear, inclusive, and context sensitive education that minimises discrimination and inequality.

The data also reveals challenges within the application of declarative knowledge on a day-to-day basis. Confusion is being perpetuated by the maelstrom of messages surrounding the constituents of a healthy diet and the increasing number of sources from which information can be acquired, for example, social media platforms (Clark et al., 2019; Spiteri -Cornish and Moraes, 2015). This was acknowledged by stakeholders who suggested that there are significant challenges presented to the public wanting to make healthy choices, particularly where marketing strategies can promote a healthy narrative for products that may be categorised as less than satisfactory. This stakeholder worked in public health and could therefore be considered conversant in nutrition but exemplified the challenge that can be faced on a personal level:

*“Marketing is pushed. I don't think it's people's fault. ... It's really hard to understand what's healthy. And I cook from scratch, I love it. I come from a restaurant background... but I then struggled ... you've got stuff that's advertised as a healthy snack for a child, but then you look on the back because it's got no added sugar, but it's got glucose, ...which is even worse. Or this whole thing that we had as a culture and a history of pushing”.*

Public Health Commissioner – Participant 41

Misleading product labelling and marketing could be interpreted as a population level issue. However, it could be understood that those individuals who find themselves with restricted choice based on access, availability, and affordability also find themselves disproportionately impacted. Firstly, where lower levels of literacy do exist, there may be a heavier reliance on front of pack labelling; brand cues such as imagery and unsubstantiated health claims such as a product being described as ‘wholesome’ exploit this vulnerability (Harris et al., 2009). Secondly, where access may be limited to alternatives there may be an increased reliance on products using this misleading nutritional information when provisioning.

To an extent, body image may also be conflated with associations of a healthy lifestyle; in one instance this was also linked into the issues of how living in poverty has strong interlinkages with mental health:

*“I lost my job and all of that, I had a mental breakdown and like a lot of people I had a fixation with food. Every now and again I would sort of eat veg, but I would just eat meat, steak, steak, steak. And just gorge myself. Just pump iron all day”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 34

### **6.2.2 Conclusion to declarative knowledge sub-theme**

These findings reveal stratified inconsistencies concerning declarative knowledge which is evidenced by the confusion surrounding the constituents of a healthy diet and how this might be applied in practice. High level messages, such as the five a day campaign, were clearly embedded but issues surrounding implementation became apparent. Echoing the findings surrounding functional knowledge ‘healthy’ appears to be

associated with fresh produce, cooked from scratch which could be perceived as dominant 'middle-class' norms and values.

This becomes problematic, and hegemonic, when these values are promoted to the exclusion of practices, such as the use of frozen or tinned produce, which may be necessitated within the context of food insecurity but are, at the same time, within the principles of healthy eating. This data highlights how this exemplifies othering and marginalisation. Significantly, the data also reveals a degree of self-stigmatising where responses show that what respondents incorrectly perceive to be 'unhealthy choices' elicit feelings of guilt or inadequacy.

On this basis it could be argued that the imperative for food literacy interventions is necessary but misaligned, that there is more to be done at a population level that addresses the realities of how declarative knowledge is applied in a variety of contexts including those where food insecurity is prevalent.

### **6.3 Sub-Theme: Heuristics**

Food literacy is an individual's ability to make decisions that lead to better individual health status and lead to a sustainable food system considering all social, environmental, cultural, economic, and political factors (Cullen et al., 2015). This definition of food literacy acknowledges the interaction of the individual with their environment and thus if food literacy is to function the two cannot be extricated from each other. Heuristics are mental shortcuts for solving problems in a quick way that deliver a result that is 'sufficient enough' given time constraints or the employment of a pragmatic method that achieves a 'good enough' result given consideration of the context or environment (Chen, 2016; Gigerenzer, 2005). Where the best result is unachievable or impractical given the circumstances, it is suggested that this form of decision making may not be fully optimised, rationalised, or perfected but is employed to reduce cognitive load. Problem solving was identified by Block et al. (2011) as a component factor of food literacy, describing how procedural knowledge involves the

capability to apply knowledge in food –related decision making. These decisions may be automatic, learned or as is applicable within the context of food insecurity, situationally influenced.

The integrative overview of food literacy (Appendix A) shows little consensus beyond functional and declarative knowledge on which factors define what it means to be food literate. Just three papers overtly reference budgeting (Desjardin and Azervado, 2013; Lawliss et al., 2019; Slater et al., 2018) and whilst doing so place it within functional knowledge. However, despite the apparent lack of consensus, in the presence of food insecurity budgeting is a critical factor. This is in so much as knowing how to acquire household provisions with the resources available is fundamental. One could suggest that this may be more foundational to achieving individual food literacy than the acquisition of food preparation skills if any form of sustainability is to be maintained. Hawley et al. (2021), for example, indicate that the most salient points, alongside cookery, in achieving a healthy diet are having the adequate numeracy and literacy skills necessary and overcoming difficulty budgeting. The OED defines budgeting as the preparation of a budget or financial planning (Oxford English Dictionary, 2025). Financial literacy refers to an individual’s capacity to access, understand, and apply financial knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about managing financial resources, including budgeting, saving, and expense prioritisation. (Lusardi and Mitchell, 2014) Therefore, given the inadequacy of household finances with which to purchase supply by ‘normal’ means, it is proposed that, within this context, budgeting extends beyond traditional financial transactions and considers holistically how an ‘adequacy’ of supply is acquired.

In parallel, food insecurity creates additional obstacles and barriers that impact on the opportunity to utilise functional and declarative knowledge. There exists a dialogue within responses in this research that suggests a degree of expectation that those experiencing food insecurity should undertake activity above and beyond what could be perceived as a societal norm in order to achieve a parity of health opportunities. Examples of such, to be discussed, would be the promotion of cookery techniques that are unrealistic or unachievable and therefore inequitable. Secondly, within the context

of lower household incomes, that the level of what may be considered a normal standard of living should potentially be reduced. Whilst not concerning income directly, these disparities could be considered a form of material deprivation (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2025) and exemplify how experiences of poverty exacerbate exclusion from acceptable social norms.

Within the conceptual framework (Figure 12), heuristic factors are no longer a component at the intrinsic level but now form a bridge between intrinsic and extrinsic factors. These involve the application of knowledge, such as budgeting or household provisioning. Heuristic factors have applicability within any socio-economic environment but are particularly pertinent where additional challenges to capacity are introduced by food insecurity.

### **6.3.1 Aims and context**

This sub- theme aims to explore heuristic factors, including how they interact and are applied, to increase understanding of how food insecurity interlinks with food literacy. Building upon previous discussions of functional and declarative knowledge that comprise intrinsic factors, this sub-theme examines how food literacy cannot be exclusively concerned with what people know or what they can do, but how this is implemented within the constraints of poverty.

This component responds directly to the research question of how food insecurity intersects with food literacy by unpacking the assumption that so called poor choices are made because of a lack of ability or knowledge to do otherwise. Instead, the discussion challenges these narratives. Attention is drawn to the wider structural factors that shape food practices within the context of food insecurity that necessitate behaviours that may be interpreted as beyond the normal practices associated with household food provisioning.

It is estimated that approximately 1.2 million people in the UK are living within areas that could be designated as a food desert, that is where access to affordable healthy food is limited (Blake, 2019). Evolved understanding of food deserts extend beyond physical access to a shop to include online access; it is proposed that, within this definition, 13.8 million people could be affected (Janatabadi et al., 2024). Whilst the level of inequality implies a commonality of experience between those affected, it is notable that food deserts can also be experienced individually with nuance occurring between person to person (Blake, 2019). Where this research adopts a social constructivist position the heuristic factors identified are those deduced from the associated fieldwork. Where these findings are based upon the responses within this research they may be considered reflective of experiences generally, but it is also acknowledged that individual experiences may vary.

During the fieldwork, a conscious decision was made not to directly refer to participants as food insecure where, following learnings from the first phase of the research, the use of academic terminology may not have been appropriate. Secondly, where there may be stigma associated with accessing food aid interventions, those experiencing food insecurity may be hesitant to be identified as such where they wish to disassociate themselves from this label or simply do not self-identify (Earnshaw and Karpyn, 2021; Taylor et al., 2024). Misidentification or incorrectly labelling respondents may have jeopardised the level of candour within answers given. The following quote exemplifies this:

*“One of the schools that \*\*\*\*\*, our grandson goes to, does it. There’s always a packet of pasta, but I think, for me, I would feel bad taking it. There might be somebody worse off”.*

Community Café Customer - Participant 6

Instead, participants were asked how the cost-of-living crisis had impacted their own, or their beneficiaries’, food behaviours.

### 6.3.2 Strategies to make food go further

This component sets out to illustrate how findings show that securing an adequate and sufficient diet requires complex and adaptive strategies on the part of the individual. The data reveals that it is not simply about availability for those impacted but concerns also extend to the quality, suitability, and sufficiency of food provided within extended interventions and beyond. Where deficit-based narratives have suggested a lack of certain skills and knowledge, this component argues that increased levels of planning, food management, and organisation are required if household needs are to be met.

Data acquired from across the research sample indicate that beneficiaries are visiting multiple food interventions in order to access food provision that meets needs:

*“So, then we’ve noticed that people will tour all the food banks in the area. So, this one’s open on a Monday . this one’s open on a Wednesday... and (they’ll) just go to each one and stock up just in case”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 31

Where latter definitions of food insecurity (FAO, 2023) extend to accommodate the uncertainty that food, or the means with which to acquire it, may be available, the idea of ‘stocking up just in case’ exemplifies this. However, the necessity to visit multiple food interventions is also reflective of the issue that the nature of the food on offer does not adequately reflect the needs of those accessing. For instance, that the combination of foods available do not create a cohesive whole with which adequate meals can be prepared. Additionally, on several occasions respondents suggested that the food on offer was of insufficient quality from a food hygiene perspective. The Feedback Used By Report (2025) states that more than 10% of the food donated into food projects has to be discarded; this is an issue that disproportionately negatively impacts smaller organisations where more of what is received ends up being thrown away. The issue of

food quality was reflected in responses from interviewees. In one setting, several beneficiaries recalled that whilst they were able to acquire a decent quantity of food from a particular social supermarket that it was often very short dated and, particularly in the case of fresh produce, had use-by dates within a 24-hour period. This, it was felt, represented a false economy as limited resources were being spent on food that was ultimately going to be discarded anyway:

*“We used to go to the other one, but that went expensive...it was always out of date and rotten and everything”.*

Food Pantry Customer -Participant 45



*Figure 19: Representative example of food quality in settings.*

It may also be that the restrictions placed on the quantity of food available to each customer create inadequacy; where an emergency food parcel is designed to last three days, a similar quantity of food becomes the allowance for customers in a social supermarket scenario. The knock-on effect from this is that, in order to stretch household budgets as much as possible, multiple food interventions are being

frequented. This contradicts previous findings, albeit within the United States (Beatty et al., 2014) that indicate food insecurity reduces the amount of time spent provisioning. However, this was a study undertaken in conjunction with the SNAP food assistance programme which may have had some influence on reducing the necessity for accessing food from multiple sources. The authors do also acknowledge the need for a systems approach to addressing food insecurity rather than simply providing food vouchers.



Figure 20: Restrictions placed on the number of items available to customers.

It should be noted that responses within this research suggest that a level of increased capacity is required generally when acquiring resources and that this is not a phenomenon unique to the food aid interventions visited. Increased levels of organisation, preparation, and planning were required in the process of acquiring food. Beneficiaries stated that, when shopping previously, they knew how much they would be budgeting and from which retailers they would be acquiring produce:

*“...and I’d be like, Okay, I’ve got £30 for this one and £30 for this one”.*

Community Café Customer - Participant 4

However, the fluctuations in prices had introduced a level of uncertainty and anxiety, particularly with the addition of increased utilities and other household expenditure:

*“Sometimes it would go over, and I’d be like, Oh S\*\*\*, obviously there’s more outgoings than there is left. Well next month, I’ve already written that down £200 left. So, I’ve still got to get shopping with that and then try and see if it will go for the rest of the month”.*

Community Café Customer - Participant 4

During focus group conversations, participants discussed between themselves the best places to find affordable fruit and vegetables. The potential to shop in one supermarket or store was not an option if everything required was to be attained within the budgets available. References were made to shopping for certain foods in various retailers based on current prices, what was on offer and the perceived quality and longevity of the product:

*“I seen the advert last night. I thought ‘oh that’s good’ because our local supermarket’s not brilliant. Aldi had the spuds, the carrots, the swede, Asda they’ve got the broccoli on, and for biscuits and cakes go to Quality Save”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 35

Similarly, the logistics of dealing with such produce also created barriers with respondents suggesting that there was a limit to the quantity of food that could be frozen, if it could be frozen at all where the cost of utilities also impacted. This was an issue replicated elsewhere within the research. One food intervention visited stated that they have had to turn off their fridges and freezers because funds available did not extend to accommodating increased energy bills. This is demonstrably problematic where it not only reintroduces a limitation to the variety of food available to those seeking support, but also, indicates practicing a pre-existing knowledge and skillset around household management is restricted by forces outside of the individual’s control. For example, other stakeholders acknowledged that having the financial resources available to acquire a quantity of food when discounted, that could be stored and used at times when household finances were more stretched, necessitated available funds in that moment which may be something not available to all:

*“...the cost of living and, you know, worrying about money? Because, I mean, we're just really adjusting the way that we think about money and food. It's just hitting us. So, you know, like, okay, we were fortunate. So, when they had all the meats half price in*

*Tesco's at the weekend, my husband bought loads of them, put them in the freezer, you know, but, you know, people, not everybody's fortunate enough to be able to do that".*

Regional EFAI Coordinator – Participant 42

The findings reveal that the strategies to make food go further extend beyond sourcing food and into how the most can be made of resources once acquired. Whilst some may be potentially unusual or isolated in nature, these could be considered indicative of the kind of behaviours required to achieve what could be understood to be an adequate diet in the presence of food insecurity. Their inclusion within these findings is justified for two reasons. Firstly, the adopted social constructivist ontology values individual phenomenon over any form of triangulation or endorsement based on collective experience (Creswell,2009). Secondly, because these also challenge the notion that there may be a generalised absence of functional and declarative food literacy, findings that mirror those of Slater (2017) who emphasizes that true food literacy extends beyond functional competencies to incorporate the ability to navigate complexity. Such competencies include the cultivation of adaptive behaviours which become essential in the process of achieving an adequate diet; therefore, it could be argued that the more complex the context is, the more adaptation may be required.

Many stakeholders asserted that profligate spending was a phenomenon within food insecure households, which will be discussed subsequently, however beneficiaries evidenced behaviours to counter this. Planning as a mechanism for making food go further formed part of household strategies with the unexpected outcomes of potentially healthier diets:

*"Plan, like ten days ahead, I look what's in there and I go, right, that's for my son. What's for me? And on that day, that day, that day, that day. And I'm now eating a lot healthier; a lot more veg in my diet".*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 34

Similarly, forethought was shown to be required and evidenced by batch cooking in advance. In this instance, this could also be construed as necessary in order to

accommodate the challenges to capacity but primarily to ensure that absolutely no food was wasted unnecessarily:

*“I do normally three days at a time. So, nothing goes out a day. I know what I need. It's done after school, so I'm not f\*\*\*\* about. Yeah, because I ain't got the patience to be cooking food”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 37

As has been discussed, the way that foods are cooked could be considered a form of planning where food preparation that requires excessive or unavailable forms of energy are discounted in favour of more economical methods. This also extends to the types of foods selected to extend dishes to feed as many as possible with what is available:

*“ So, if you do stew, meat and then old veg. Not as much veg...So you're sort of doing things like potatoes and...”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 35

Whilst this may exemplify the public health guidance of basing meals on starchy foods (GOV.UK, 2024) this could still be questionable for two reasons. Firstly, the extent to which other macro nutrients are being consumed to create an overall balanced diet and secondly, the extent to which these are decisions based on choice or heuristics demonstrated out of necessity within the context of food insecurity. In addition, the demonstration of these behaviours does not equate to an adequacy of food for all as suggested by one beneficiary:

*“...so long as my kids are eating, I don't care what happens to me... everything's geared towards my son...he's got to be able to stuff his face, have what he wants and I'll just be like, I'll be wasting away”*

Community Café Customer - Participant 7

The following quote, drawn from focus group transcript, exemplifies the abnormal strategies being employed to make food go further. On a superficial level, this could be interpreted as resourceful and, arguably, typifying food literacy at a community level.

However, it potentially also provides an illustration of the behaviours having to be adopted against the backdrop of poverty:

*“We found a way in my street, so three houses all put into the shopping, and one person does all these. That's the new one. That's really good. So, we've got me, I do the cooking. So, my nephew lives next door. He lives on his own, so he won't cook. Got \*\*\*\* all in the flat.... so, the pair of them are so thin the wind will blow (them) away”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 35

Food insecurity exists against a backdrop of ongoing scarcity, where knowledge and skills in isolation are insufficient. This component has demonstrated that far from there being an absence of literacy, the behaviours and strategies described are indicative of a high level of function within constrained circumstances. This may be considered representative of Lister's (2006) view of poverty and enforced exclusion whereby additional labour is imposed on the poor, often in return for less, and increases marginalisation. The need to frequent multiple interventions, navigate inconsistent and, occasionally, inadequate supply whilst employing time and energy intensive strategies in order to meet what could be considered a basic standard exemplifies how experiencing food insecurity disrupts normal provisioning practices. Rather than addressing the structural issues that are creating the issue of food insecurity, this is demonstrative of the critique of neoliberal individualism (Levitas, 2005) which places the responsibility and burden of coping on the individual.

### **6.3.3 Profligate spending and financial precarity**

This component sets out to examine the narratives around how, and on what, money is spent by those experiencing food insecurity. The first theme of this research reveals a narrative that suggests an over-reliance on take-away and delivery services is attributable to a lack of functional knowledge. This is often accompanied by a broader narrative that frames these choices as also being indicative of poor budgeting practices.

However, findings suggest a more complex picture, rather than being a consequence of affordability or preference, these behaviours are shaped by reduced capacity, limited

alternatives, and the psychological strain introduced by poverty. Drawing from scarcity theory this component aims to illustrate that, whilst appearing illogical, this behaviour is consistent with the demands of living in a state of prolonged uncertainty.

The first phase of the research suggested that food pantry customers were spending a disproportionately high percentage of elastic household spend on delivered takeaway services. Similar statements were made by stakeholders throughout the fieldwork. The only exception to this was when it was noted in one setting that there wasn't an opportunity to access these services, yet, even here, the appeal was appreciated:

*“We don't have any (delivery services) around here, because we're not near a takeaway, disappointingly sometimes, if you would really like not to cook, not to clean”.*

Food Pantry Director - Participant 50

Stakeholders and practitioners commonly asserted that experiences of food insecurity could be partially attributable to a spendthrift culture within the communities they served and the apparent excessive use of fast-food delivery services, such as Deliveroo or Just Eat etc. It was not uncommon for those interviewed to suggest that recklessness with money, notably how it was spent on food, was increasing the reliance upon the food aid services on offer.

There was also acknowledgement of the socio-economic area in which people lived and how that may influence food decisions. There is an apparent paradox where the perception is that communities are making unhealthy choices, however these may not be 'choices' at all when access to alternatives are restricted:

*“There is quite a bit of evidence isn't there that poorer people eat more ultra processed foods and a less healthy diet. The food desert thing's around the sort of distance you are away from takeaways, depending on the socioeconomic area that you live in”.*

Food Pantry Manager - Participant 51

However, most frequently, the data suggested that the use of delivery services was perceived as being attributable to a lack of functional skills which also extended into managing household budgets. This research has confirmed, as discussed, that beneficiaries do, from time to time, leverage the convenience of take-aways, particularly where inequity increases the capacity required to undertake health promoting activities. However, the conversation around an over reliance on or predisposition towards fast food retailers does also contradict the experiences of some of those beneficiaries interviewed. Where it may be conceived by stakeholders that beneficiaries are accessing takeaways because they perceive them to be cheaper or more affordable than resourcing basic component ingredients, interviewees suggested that affordability was not influencing uptake:

*“Nearly forty quid now...Yeah if he wants a Big Mac, If I got McDonalds for me and the kids, its costs nearly forty quid just for one (visit)”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 37

This raises the question of why, if finances are limited and elastic spend is reduced, are fast food retailers still being accessed. Whilst the narrative of stakeholders may be critiqued as potentially exaggerated, it remains that accessing sources of food that are both detrimental to health and unaffordable would be illogical. Whilst this may be attributed to a lack of capacity introduced by food insecurity or a lack of alternatives in a food desert scenario, data within the research also suggests that experiences of poverty, such as the introduction of universal benefit system, exacerbate spending behaviours that may be considered to be profligate. Whilst not directly related to food, one stakeholder suggested that some beneficiaries lacked the foresight to deal with having the less frequent but larger deposits of money that universal credit creates:

*“When they suddenly got their benefits and it went, we’ve paid you £950, but £600 of that is your rent, I’ve had clients go and buy a 60” television, they just didn’t get it”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 12

In a different setting, the notion of how food budgets were spent was raised directly:

*“Young people don’t appreciate money. You know ...he pays his house, his car but you know what? He probably spends 50% of the rest of his money on McDonalds or Domino’s and they don’t appreciate the value of money”.*

Regional EFAI Coordinator – Participant 42

Thematic analysis of the data also reveals that motivations around the selection of certain foods, and frequenting certain food retailers, extend into areas of social and cultural belonging which will be discussed separately. However, where inadequate food literacy has also been described as a lack of critical thinking skills to be able to reject misinformation to make informed decisions (Spurlock, 2024) it is feasible that experiencing food insecurity interlinks where it introduces even further challenges.

It has been suggested that experiencing poverty creates spending behaviours that may otherwise not be seen amongst those who do not experience financial hardship. Drawing from scarcity theory, Achtziher (2022) states that a seemingly irrational economic mindset is introduced that can appear counterproductive and ultimately trap people within a state of poverty. A culture is introduced of ‘spend when you have it, for you don’t know when you might have it again’. Mani et al. (2013) indicate that the capacity required to achieve an acceptable standard of living on limited means limits the cognitive ability to make decisions based on potential future benefits. Arguably, this is being demonstrated within the actions of those choosing to access more expensive food options, albeit whilst funds are available to do so. Similar evidence of this kind of spending behaviour was found within the research data:

*“Yeah, B&M’s good for that. And you can spend a fortune. You can do some damage bulk buying. You gotta wait until you’ve got a bit of money in your pocket and you go in there and you go, right, let’s just go for it”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 35

The research data has exposed a narrative, primarily from stakeholders, that spending behaviours within the communities in which they work is perceived as irresponsible or indulgent. However, this section has also highlighted that these behaviours are, in reality,

more reflective of the additional psychological burden and environmental constraints introduced by experiences of food insecurity and poverty.

Demonstrably, othering has been evidenced where stakeholders often attribute such behaviours to a lack of budgeting skills or a disregard for healthy choices, but the data suggests that these behaviours may be better attributed as responses to structural inequalities, limitations on capacity, and reduced bandwidth. These decisions may appear counterproductive but are explicable within the context. Therefore, this questions dominant narratives (Bragg et al., 2025; Bowen and Hardison-Moody, 2023) and calls for more nuanced decisions that are shaped by the lived experiences of the populations of interest.

#### **6.3.4 Competition and anxieties**

This component explores how the notion of scarcity plays out in the lived experience of food insecurity, particularly within food aid settings but also within ‘conventional’ retailers. Responses point towards the way that sporadic and unpredictable supply not only disrupts normal food practices but actively introduces additional mental and emotional burden. These are anxieties shown to affect both beneficiaries and practitioners. Finally, this section considers how these conditions shape behaviours within spaces of food aid and demonstrate how the limitations of supply may unintentionally contribute to the insecurity that interventions seek to address.

The notion of scarcity also emerges within responses to beneficiary behaviours within food insecure environments and the associated impacts. Demonstrably, food insecurity creates barriers to what may be considered the normal practice of provisioning; increased effort is required to acquire the necessary resources against a potential additional barrier of reduced capacity to accommodate these additional processes. Further stressors are introduced where there is increased urgency associated with shopping or accessing what supply is available if it is to meet needs. The sporadic nature of supply, particularly where there may be a finite number of certain items, means that beneficiaries find themselves in a ‘state of competition’. The need to be at the head of

the queue and to ‘get there before the all the good stuff goes’ could be perceived as adding to already overstretched mental and emotional capacity:

*“...and you got to get into Aldi early if you want to get your veg as well, otherwise it goes straight away”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 35

Whilst this was an isolated comment on the challenge of shopping in ‘mainstream retail’, it is representative of how resourcing food and other household provisions from food aid settings introduces heightened levels of anxiety for beneficiaries, as well as logistical challenges for practitioners who seek a fair and equitable mechanism of distribution. The settings taking part in this research were reflective of UK food aid interventions generally. As highlighted, stock for food aid interventions would be sourced from food rescue wholesalers, food retailers, and purchased using donated funds. Respondents suggested that there was a ‘perfect storm’ occurring with increased demand for services co-existing with reduced supply:

*“I know that there are other food banks that are literally dragging, you know, a bag of sugar off the streets, desperate to make sure that somebody’s got stuff. They’re in real, real, difficult situations”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 31



Figure 21: Availability of fresh produce is extremely limited during food pantry trading.

How these challenges are addressed intersects with subsequent themes around dignity and othering, but within the context of heuristic factors of food literacy, and in particular provisioning, the uncertainty and additional anxiety introduced by sporadic supply creates conflict. Where those accessing services were given choice over produce, practitioners related that this would introduce behaviours that were problematic and potentially anti-social:

*“So, we took over the running of the \*\*\*\*\* and after just observing how people were using it... people filling up baskets to the rim, that it sort of wasn’t fair”.*

Food Project Director – Participant 18

However, others suggested that these behaviours were symptomatic of the constraints of the environment:

*“We don’t know what we’re going to get every week. So, when the people come there’s sometimes a bit of anxiety that people might not get the good stuff....and that creates tension in the queue about who’s got there first... there’s a feeling of weight the whole time”.*

Food Project Director – Participant 18

These findings reflect those of previous research. The Food Foundation (2024) state that food insecurity and poor mental health are inextricably interlinked, pertinently the conditions in which food insecurity exists often exacerbates poor mental health. Whilst rates of depression, anxiety and psychological distress are more prevalent amongst adults on lower incomes, evidence suggests that the relationship may be bi-directional and that experiences of food insecurity may exacerbate and cause poor mental health as much as poor mental health being a risk factor for falling into poverty (Huddleston-Casas et al., 2009; Wolfson et al., 2017). Latter definitions of food insecurity reference not only the physical shortage of food but the worry that there may be an adequacy (FAO, 2023). Whilst categorically not an overt intention of those seeking to support those in need, it could be argued that the intervention seeking to alleviate food insecurity is

inadvertently reinforcing or contributing towards it. Pertinently, where models replicating traditional retail experiences and increasing choice are promoted, there is a suggestion that this must be also supported by an adequate and consistent food supply chain, containing appropriate produce, for effective operation and to prevent unintentional negative outcomes.

This component has demonstrated that food literacy, particularly in relation to provisioning, cannot be understood in isolation from the wider structural realities of food insecurity. Where findings have highlighted behaviours such as rushing to secure limited stock, competing for adequate supply, and managing heightened strain, the social and material constraints introduced by poverty have been evidenced. The absence of stable and dignified food environments requires the navigation of systems that are fragmented and anxiety inducing which could be interpreted as a form of social exclusion where it reduces the opportunity to participate in what could be considered social norms; both in how food is accessed but also in the ability to apply intrinsic food literacy factors.

### **6.3.5 Barriers to practice**

The findings and discussion within this chapter have, so far, focussed on perceptions of whether the narrative that a skills and knowledge gap is justified alongside exploration of what may be driving such discourse. However, findings within this research also indicate that, whilst some may be lacking in skills and knowledge, it is external constraints that compromise the opportunity for literacy skills to be implemented. This component aims to demonstrate how socio-economic conditions, and their associated effects, such as limited access to affordable and appropriate foods, inadequate infrastructure, mental and physical health, and the unpredictability of food aid supply all contribute.

The application of knowledge, as a heuristic factor of food literacy, assumes the pre-existence of functional and declarative knowledge. It is noted, and to be discussed subsequently, that experiences of food insecurity may impact the acquisition of intrinsic factors. However, data suggests that context, the socio-economic environment and its effects impacts how food skills are practiced.

### 6.3.6 Capacity

The contextual circumstances of respondents, such as where physical and mental barriers were created by experiences of disability, had a bearing on how much cookery was carried out within the household:

*“I think that’s why she got sick...I used to phone them up and all the time they would say, oh, they’re just nipping to McDonalds...Every single night they had tea at McDonalds because my mum’s got a disability, and she couldn’t cook, and my dad got fed up”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 38

As discussed, the increased complexity that can be introduced into households by poverty, and experiences of it, can limit the ability to accommodate the changes necessary to facilitate healthier outcomes. Here, it is reasonable to suggest that ‘fed up’ is euphemistic for burnout and lacking the capacity to take on more. Similarly, the emotional impact of caring responsibilities, and the economic implications that are introduced when opportunities for paid work must be relinquished, bears a direct relationship with the decisions on what food is purchased within the household:

*“She was eating a tin of soup every night... and I had to come and stay here, had to go and buy it, because I had to give up work... so I didn’t want to use her pension either and she was getting quite stressed out about me buying vegetables and stuff”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 38

The exploration of functional knowledge questioned whether the narrative that a skills gap may be a misinterpretation of how cookery is perceived. Similarly, how cookery is valued by different groups. Thematic analysis of the data also raises questions regarding how any pre-existing knowledge may be applied within the context of food insecurity. Poverty extends beyond a lack of income and considers multiple factors including how

the wider environment impacts the availability and accessibility of unhealthy foods as well as the affordability of healthy options. Similarly, increased demands on time, either through paid work or domestic responsibilities, can be considered an additional impact of poverty (Dorn et al., 2023; Sawyer et al., 2012). Such factors introduce inequities that may inhibit the application of functional and declarative knowledge:

*“And also, when you're cooking, it's not just about making something healthy. You're generally catering for the lowest common denominator. If you're cooking for a family, you're cooking something that people will eat, you're preparing something that people will eat. You don't want to be throwing things away, you don't want to be experimenting, you can't afford to do that, especially when you're on low income. So, for all of those reasons, it can be easier just to put something in the oven that's prepared”.*

Food Charity Trustee – Participant 58

### **6.3.7 Sporadic, unpredictable, and inappropriate supply**

Rather than there being an absence of functional knowledge, is it then the *opportunity* to utilise pre-existing literacy that is impacted by the presence of food insecurity? Begley et al. (2019), for example, explored the associations food literacy and food insecurity finding that improved food literacy skills may improve self-efficacy but, crucially, that any intervention for food insecure populations must coincide with other strategies and interventions that address circumstances for any kind of effectiveness to be sustainable. Within the responses gathered for this research, barriers to practice manifest in two ways; firstly, where the increasing incidence of working poverty places time constraints upon individuals which negatively impacts how ‘healthy’ the foods being prepared are when convenience takes priority over the utilisation of skills and knowledge that may be at the disposal of the individual:

*“I think a lot of times parents are pushed, or you've been out for work, you've done a job where you have worked 12 hours in a factory, all you want to do is come back and eat a meal that will satisfy you, and you don't have that time. Or as a parent, you don't have that time because your kids are screaming at you and you need to just put something on the table because you've been out all day. You pick them up at after school club or whatever, you're struggling”.*

Secondly, food literacy sits within the utilisation pillar of food security (Begley et al., 2019). However, as discussed within the literature review, the absence of any one pillar of food security results in disequilibrium. To facilitate utilisation that effectively supports a healthy lifestyle access, availability, and stability are also required. When considering how health inequalities might be addressed, availability, or lack of it, potentially also extends beyond considering whether there is simply enough food into whether there are enough foods available that accommodate the needs of those consuming it:

*“And the shop on my estate, like, it doesn’t sell anything fresh...it’s only like the lowest quality of processed food. It really came to light how our access to food and nutrition is limited by the poverty of our environment”.*

Food Insecurity Campaigner - Participant 1

Responses, overall, would suggest that the notion of there being some form of skills gap, that itself contributes in some way towards health inequalities, is a misnomer. The pre-existence of fundamental functional skills was evidenced in the majority, if not all, of instances. Arguably, there is an issue of knowing *what* to do with the resources available rather than *how* to prepare the resources available. The food pantry model tends towards a certain number of products in exchange for a nominal fee. However, where the nature of supply is often sporadic and unpredictable, beneficiaries may feel obliged to choose from a selection that is alien, unknown, or that does not lend itself to the production of what could be objectively considered to be a balanced, nutritious meal:

*“One of the big problems that was identified, and it wasn’t just us, but a couple of places in \*\*\*\* was the way food banks, and food pantries worked...is that people will be given a selection of food that they can’t actually do anything with”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 2

Whilst referencing the adequacy of emergency food parcels for vulnerable groups during the Covid-19 pandemic, similar references were made regarding the suitability of produce for the intended recipients. This extended to the accommodation of specific dietary requirements such as allergies and intolerances as well as cultural and religious needs. Responses also suggested that the size of products distributed, such as produce packaged for catering being allocated to single pensioners, were creating challenges. These findings are typical (University of Edinburgh, 2025), food rescue channels, on the whole, are supplied with produce that has in some way been diverted away from mainstream retail. It is notable that where fresh produce was available to customers of the food pantries visited, a significant proportion tended towards root vegetables. This was presumably because of the longer shelf life afforded. However, these vegetables would be less popular generally, not just in a food aid setting. Hecht and Neff (2019) suggest that these types of food are commonplace within food rescue, with fresh produce, when available, tending to be primarily root vegetables and bakery produce. One stakeholder in this research suggested that ‘they like celeriac but there’s ‘only so many ways you can prepare it before you get bored of it’. In another setting, beetroot had been mistaken for celeriac by volunteers and was being sold as such. Whilst the produce on offer is heavily discounted, it is feasible that limited finance will still impel customers towards selections that they know will be eaten by members of the household to leverage the most value for money despite the reduced cost. It should also be questioned as to whether stakeholders are misinterpreting this hesitancy to accept these foods that are universally less popular as an inability to prepare them:

*“In a way, I think people were scared of taking it, even though our fruit and vegetable is a part of our free items, but they were too scared to take it because they didn’t know how to do it or didn’t know what it was. There’s plenty of people coming in who ...if they were shopping in a supermarket, they wouldn’t choose that item”.*

Food Pantry Manager – Participant 32

These sentiments were echoed across many of the settings visited, with those fulfilling operational roles stating that products acquired through food rescue channels had become inconsistent and, on occasion, not even originally meant for human consumption:

*“So, it was like \*\*\*\*\* was the bulk and then you were topping up and now it’s almost gone the other way and it’s just so random, some of the stuff”.*

Food Pantry Manager - Participant 54

### **6.3.8 Affordability and access**

When considering access to affordable healthy food, further inequities were highlighted. Interviewees suggested that national retailers, albeit in the form of convenience stores, potentially increased access to a range of healthier foods locally but a premium was being placed on these products compared to larger out of town options. This supplement, which may be considered a necessary price to pay for convenience, becomes a tax for those who place higher levels of reliance upon local food retail.

The default setting regarding access, or lack of it, tends towards thinking about physical and economic access to retail that offers an affordable, appropriate variety of foods (Devereux et al., 2020) and the issue of higher prices within smaller local outlets demonstrates this. Food insecurity can be exacerbated where inadequate transportation, for example, creates challenges that inhibit the opportunity to select and prepare foods that can be objectively considered as healthy. Even where public transport is available, limitations are introduced surrounding how much can be physically carried. Where, for instance, the most affordable food retail may be an out-of-town supermarket the opportunity to leverage the benefit of that may only really be available to those with access to a car:

*“(if you have) three kids, you know, do you want to drag them around Budgens.... Accessing (Town) is terrible in terms of busses. If you want to go to Tesco’s you go into town and out again, there’s no direct route. Sainsbury’s you can’t get across. So, you’ve got accessible supermarkets but they’re very expensive”.*

Community Chaplain / EFAI Coordinator - Participant 29

Where it may be considered that online shopping may offer opportunities in similar situations, other respondents suggested that different barriers may be encountered within this scenario. Discounting the possibility of internet poverty, not only do potential

minimum order costs or additional delivery fees increase the actual cost of shopping, but also the ability to log on in the first place may be an issue:

*“We had a 94-year-old lady who was told to go online to do her shopping and couldn’t. She phoned us rather upset because she’d been pushed about in Sainsbury’s. Couldn’t. Came home, couldn’t get any bread, couldn’t get any milk... they didn’t have any family to support them”.*

Food Project Director – Participant 40

Pertinently, for some, the inaccessibility of supply extends further beyond a lack of adequate transportation or IT skills. Several of the hyper local projects visited were in areas with high indices of deprivation which would also include increased rates of crime. Field notes created during the first phase of the research reflect on the physical environment in which the EFAI sits:

*“The food pantry is located within the main building, itself situated opposite a public library and adjacent to a precinct of shops (many closed/boarded up). Buildings are functional / post-war concrete ... very little green / natural. \*\*\*\*\* are situated within what appears to be a prefab / flat-roof single-story space. When we arrive, we are told that the skylight to the building had been damaged following an attempted break-in.”*

Excerpt from field notes (Appendix O)

This is indicative of many food pantries across the country. FAO (2021) extended the definition of food insecurity to include uncertainty, demonstrated within this research is the fact that this uncertainty extends beyond anxiety over having the food itself and concerns anxieties over the process of accessing it. Conversations revealed that many people would not feel safe on their own in the area in which they lived which would impact their ability to access provisions. The following quote from a practitioner that organised an independent food pantry suggests that the experiences of their beneficiaries belie what may be apparent at a superficial level and food insecurity extends beyond the physical environment:

*“So actually, whilst we look very lovely on the estate, it’s all behind closed doors. The people are very proud”.*

Community Café Customer - Participant 5

This is endorsed by beneficiary comments regarding their experiences:

*“I like it when I’m at home and I can lock the door, and no one can get to me”.*

Community Café Customer - Participant 3

The presence of anxieties over physical safety was experienced first-hand during the research process. Having conducted a lunchtime focus group in a seemingly quiet residential area, I was advised that it was best to walk with some participants to the bus stop on the main road rather than walk alone, despite the apparent lack of risk.

Safety and the sentiment that the causes of food insecurity extend beyond the physical was echoed within other interviews. This may have some bearing on the need for food aid but also the potential success of extended services. In particular, where some form of behaviour change exists within the narrative of many food literacy interventions, for example changing how food is acquired and prepared or increasing understanding of the long-term health implications of food decisions made. When relating their experiences of poverty and food insecurity, both beneficiaries and multiple stakeholders closest to them, explained that existing within a persistent state of food insecurity limits the bandwidth available to affect this behaviour change:

*“Mental health is the biggest one. Lots of anxiety, which is quite crippling, getting out to places, interacting with people and then that ranges to very severe mental health and delusions and personality disorders as well”.*

EFAI manager and Signposting Lead - Participant 55

*“...and we are making very strong efforts...to get right back to that first point of why you are here? I’m more conscious of how it affects them than they are, because it is that ... almost like a PTSD sort of scenario”.*

Vicar / EFAI Project Coordinator - Participant 28

Food insecurity and poor mental health have been shown to co-exist (Food Foundation, 2025; Huddlestone- Casas et al., 2009; Wolfson et al., 2021). However, a key finding from this research suggests that when considering access as a pillar of food (in)security that consideration needs to be paid to factors exacerbating inaccessibility beyond a lack of the physical and economic. How anxiety and perceptions of safety interact requires further exploration.

### **6.3.9 Context and homelife**

Where access and availability to appropriate foods may be limited, it is often the *opportunity* to utilise these skills that is limited rather than those skills being absent. Where there exists a narrative that food aid beneficiaries are not selecting foods because of inability or lack of knowledge, this is countered by wider issues:

*“Something that impacts people’s ability to choose is access to cooking equipment and facilities and energy costs. If people can pick things that are kind of easy to cook in a microwave, in an air fryer and don’t need to turn the oven on that might mean that might be a healthier choice for them because it means that they might also be able to put the heating on for an hour”.*

Stakeholder

It becomes necessary for those commissioning, designing and delivering programmes to understand the specific circumstances and context of those attending.

This was a general critique throughout the data:

*“And one of them comments in, you know.... You just need to learn to grow your own. So, I live in a tower block. We have a balcony. We don't have access to the ground or to. ..., me and my daughter, like, I'd grow, like, herbs and tomatoes, and I think they're*

*called yellow zucchini or something on my balcony, but that isn't a diet. And that isn't, like, you can't just live off of that. So, I think these kind of dismissive approaches... They don't really get what it... What it is like to live like that".*

Food Insecurity Campaigner - Participant 1

As outlined within chapter one, the poverty and social exclusion in the UK project (Pemberton et al., 2014) argue that poverty is not simply about living on less but about being unable to have what are considered the necessities of life. Findings indicate that a real experience of food insecurity extends not just beyond being unable to have necessities but being 'expected to do more' if those necessities are to be acquired. This manifests both as food literacy strategies employed by those experiencing food insecurity but also within the expectations of those delivering interventions purported to be solutions. For example, cooking from scratch instead of leveraging the convenience afforded to others, growing your own food instead of accessing retail and, in one example, utilising methods that are both unusual and potentially unrealistic:

*"We're doing a really nice (cookery course) over the summer where not only are we dressing it as, I would say, five a day on a budget, but we're also using thermal cooking bags...so they just heat the food for like ten minutes... and then it cooks itself in this thermal bag. At the end of six trainings, they get a thermal bag as well".*

Food Project Director – Participant 17

Drawing from critical discourse analysis, the use of the term '*dressing it as*' in this context casts doubt on the authenticity and credibility of intervention's claims. A possible disconnect between the stated aims of the course and its actual impact is suggested. This raises concerns that the proposed outcomes may be tenuous or unrealistic. More overtly, and whilst at the more extreme end of proposed solutions, this is representative of many interventions offered to food aid beneficiaries. For instance, multiple settings had delivered some form of slow cooker cookery courses or had included some form of tangible incentive to attract participants. Notably, several stakeholders suggested that uptake was low and, in one instance, how they had struggled to give the slow cookers away. Evidently, the perceived attractiveness or value

placed on the intervention was less for the intended audience than those delivering it. It was suggested that, in reality, the real cost of attending a course considering potential travel, childcare, or loss of earnings, the expense did not outweigh the benefit as it was perceived by stakeholders and may actually have a higher cost in real terms than if the slow cooker were to be purchased independently. A review of community cookery interventions undertaken by Garcia et al. (2016) indicated that assessment of the effectiveness of interventions generally has tended to focus primarily on the positive outcomes from attendance, such as uptake of foods or new skills, but variation in measurement limits a full understanding. There is little in the way of preexisting literature regarding the 'real' cost for those on low incomes attending such interventions, which suggests an area for further research.

In summary, this component has shown that the perceived underutilisation of food literacy skills can be attributed to multiple external barriers. Where this research adopts the position that social exclusion is dynamic and multidimensional, these findings illustrate that interventions shaped by top-down agenda that are failing to accommodate and could be interpreted as serving to exacerbate rather than remedy.

#### **6.3.10 Conclusion to heuristics sub-theme**

In summary, discussion around this theme has demonstrated that understanding why gaps within intrinsic factors of food literacy exist, within the contexts of poverty and food insecurity, cannot be achieved without recognising the broader structural and socio-economic factors in which it is to be practiced. Significantly, this has necessitated, and justified, the creation of heuristics as a factor of food literacy.

### **6.4 Summary of findings and discussion relating to intrinsic and heuristic factors of food literacy**

These findings reflect the experiences of participants within the extended food aid interventions included in this study and should not be interpreted as representative of all

evolved models. Nonetheless, the notion that, rather than there being an absence of ability, there is an absence of opportunity for the application of functional and declarative knowledge is evident. However, this is also caveated by evidence, informed by the lived experience of the research sample, that skillsets such as budgeting, provisioning and other adaptive behaviours are increasingly required and demonstrated.

Arguably, the cumulative impact of additional poverty related stressors, including unpredictable supply, limited access, competing demands on time and energy create circumstances that require compromise or decision making that may be at odds with the 'ideal'. Data indicates that narratives suggesting that health inequalities are the result of a lack of declarative knowledge that is unique to those experiencing food insecurity are misplaced.

The theoretical foundation upon which this research sits adopts that position that social exclusion is dynamic, multi-dimensional and extends beyond material deprivation (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman, 2007). Social exclusion can be seen in the lived experience of respondents but also in the assumptions and judgements that exist within deficit-based narratives. Elements of power dynamics (Young, 2000) and symbolic dimensions of poverty (Lister, 2006), such as othering, loss of dignity, and stereotyping, are visible within interventions, particularly those that are framed as upskilling. These reflect top-down agenda and neoliberal ideologies that frame poverty as an individual failing. The 'teach a man to fish' rhetoric, whilst appealing, fails to account for contextual challenges such as income, time, infrastructure, and capacity which undermines the appeal, uptake, and efficacy of interventions.

Food literacy also extends beyond that which could be termed tangible or actionable and considers social participation, inclusion, and cultural connection which form part of the extrinsic factors. Where social exclusion is understood as relational and cultural, as well as material (Levitas, 2005), findings relating to how food insecurity intersects with these will be discussed within the next chapter.

## Chapter 7 – Extrinsic Factors of Food Literacy

### 7.0 Introduction to chapter

Chapter 6 examined how the intrinsic and heuristic elements of food literacy are influenced by food insecurity; this chapter aims to explore the extrinsic factors of food literacy.

As a minimum, being in possession of a fundamental level of intrinsic factors of food literacy is required if an individual is to be termed food literate. Similarly, having the capacity to enact heuristic factors, or the application of knowledge, is a necessity. Extrinsic factors of food literacy offer outcomes for the individual beyond satiating hunger and sustaining physical health but are no less important. The impact at a community or population level is also considered. Cullen et al. (2015, p.155) acknowledge the necessity for such a holistic perspective: *“For an individual or population to be food literate and to fully engage in their food system, an ecological approach is necessary, in that individual behaviours and skills cannot be separated from their environmental or social context”*.

This chapter will present and discuss the following sub-themes: Culture, Education, and Food Systems. These were themes elicited following a process of inductive analysis, having used the integrative overview of factors of food literacy (Appendix A) as a de facto codebook alongside deductive coding. In addition, a process of critical discourse analysis has been employed to provide both context and participant voice to the findings presented. In particular, this research draws on theories of social exclusion and othering, to explore how experiences of food insecurity extend beyond material deprivation and limit the opportunities to access, participate in, and leverage the benefits of what may be considered normal food rituals. In doing so, this chapter evidences and discusses the data contributing to the development of the conceptual framework introduced in

Chapter 5 and highlights how external constraints and enablers hold equal, if not more, significance in evolved conceptualisations of food literacy.

## 7.1 Food Culture

This sub-theme considers how food, and the absence of it, performs a role greater than satiating hunger. Identity, agency, and belonging are discussed, in particular within community food settings. In doing so, this section directly addresses the research question: How does food insecurity intersect with food literacy in the context of extended food aid interventions?

Where this research adopts a theoretical perspective drawn from theories of social exclusion, this research argues that based on the evidence collected, cultural practices around food become highly significant in the presence of food insecurity. Crucially, there are significant intersections between the religious, cultural, and social food requirements of communities and the food aid interventions that support those who are food insecure.

Food culture refers to the shared beliefs, practices, attitudes, and social norms related to food within a particular group or society (Jayasinghe et al., 2025; Mingay et al., 2021). The food people eat is not the sole determinant of food culture; how food is prepared, shared, and experienced alongside the meanings and emotions embodied within these practices should also be considered. These rituals may be influenced by history, geography, religion, or social context and hold great significance in shaping how communities relate to food. The UK Government policy paper for food strategy (2025) acknowledges the wider social, environmental, and economic benefits that can be leveraged from a functioning food system. *“Food is a big part of life in the United Kingdom. It gives us energy, brings us joy, and helps us feel connected to our communities.... Britain is what it eats: a proud, diverse and resilient nation”* (DEFRA, 2025).

Crucially, our food culture is influenced by a range of external factors and not just personal preferences or knowledge. Food is an essential factor that facilitates interaction between groups that may be categorised by ethnicity, religion, or other social criteria. Food culture is not static, situated within one place, food culture travels with the individual. This portability can generate culturally specific food needs irrespective of where someone may be (Riaz and Chaudry, 2003). The surrounding environment, how food is learnt about from others, as well as broader cultural norms and systems, including policies, all intersect and interact to shape food choices and the ways that food is engaged with.

Within the integrative overview of component factors of food literacy (Appendix A), the concept of culture was cited by Truman and Elliot (2019) and Cullen et al. (2015). Other references made, whilst not overtly referencing culture, could be interpreted as such. Desjardin and Azervedo (2013) indicate that social connection should be considered, whilst Slater et al. (2018) use 'secondary benefits' as a catch all terminology into which culture could easily fit.

Within the fieldwork, the question of how well interventions were meeting or addressing the cultural requirements of those accessing was asked. In line with the social constructivist ontology of this research (Creswell, 2009), no predetermined definition of culture was provided within the questioning. This was with the intention of eliciting subjective interpretations of respondents. Following thematic analysis of these responses two deduced themes emerged: food heritage and food authenticity, which can be understood differently.

Food heritage was found to be concerned with legacy, people and association with place (Almansouri et al., 2021). What the authors termed 'ethnic foods', were primarily concerned with people and legacy; the place dimension tended towards consideration of whether food could be considered local to a particular region.

Food authenticity, on its part, was found to be somewhat less tangible and referred to the degree to which food practices, ingredients, preparation methods, and meanings

align with the traditional beliefs, values, and expectations of a particular group. Both food heritage and food authenticity are closely linked with a sense of belonging and identity. Importantly, within food authenticity, and the adherence to religious doctrine, food decisions are potentially less flexible. The provision of produce that fail to meet these authentic requirements creates additional challenges (Sibal, 2018). Responses within this data also indicate that the provision of certain produce may create conflict for the recipient; they may find themselves unable to fulfil their religious and ethical obligations were the food to be accepted, or they may have to refuse that which is on offer and risk being perceived as ungrateful.

Echoing the findings of Almansouri et al. (2021), responses to how well interventions were meeting cultural needs overall tended towards religion, and therefore food authenticity.

For example, when responding to how services might meet cultural needs, stakeholders indicated that there may be a need to provide foods that are required by followers of different religions:

*“We’ve got one in \*\*\*\*\*, 10% of the shoppers there have halal as a dietary requirement...”*

Food Pantry Volunteer - Participant 15

Immigration status, such as seeking asylum, also featured highly when considering how well services might be meeting cultural needs, although within this context immigration status was synonymous with people of ‘other’ religions.

Stakeholders did suggest that food aid was failing to meet the food authenticity needs of diverse communities:

*“Many feel that other food banks aren’t meeting cultural requirements, such as halal... data gathering suggests that halal meat is poor quality”*

Social Supermarket Trustee - Participant 52

Where membership models provided access to affordable food, it was suggested by stakeholders that beneficiaries were reticent about voicing concerns at unmet needs for fear of punitive repercussions, such as memberships being revoked:

*“If someone wanted to say ‘I’m not happy with the way that items are being selected for the shop because it doesn’t reference my specific dietary requirement...’ They might not be confident in saying that because they are really reliant on that affordable shop”*

Vicar / EFAI Project Coordinator - Participant 28

One stakeholder suggested that the area in which their project operated was identified as being one of the most multi-cultural in the UK but that there was also a lack of engagement because of a failure to meet the dietary requirements associated with diverse communities. This reflects the findings of De Souza (2019) where assistance that aims to support may inadvertently be marginalising certain communities. However, it was also stated that the cooking culture was strong within many of the diverse communities in their catchment area, and particularly within South Asian families. There was a strong ethos of neighbourliness, and the community would tend to look after its own from within before reaching beyond.

In Sikhism, for example, Langar is a communal free kitchen in which food is offered to all as a core pillar of the religion. Significantly, in Judaism, charity is viewed as an act of social justice and similarly to Zakat and Sadahaq in Islam, the less the giver and recipient are aware of each other the more virtuous the donor becomes (Atia, 2013; Bird, 1982; Singh, 2015 cited in Power, 2022). One stakeholder recognised that there were variations of food aid interventions that may be addressing food insecurity in different ways and that these may also be less known about for individuals outside of those communities:

*“If you go to a gurdwara, you’re gonna have a good meal”.*

Vicar / EFAI Project Coordinator - Participant 28

This raises the question of whether the apparent lack of uptake of services was attributable to needs not being met or whether support was being accessed from elsewhere. Whilst contributions from several non-secular interventions make up this research data, a perceived limitation has been gaining access to interventions that are

being run by faiths other than Christian. However, the data does reveal that there are extended food aid interventions being operated by multiple faiths:

*“So, is it becoming the norm? Yes. Food banks are everywhere now; they never used to be...and that’s the ones we know. We don’t know what the churches are doing on Sunday, we don’t know what the mosques are doing. So, there’s going to be more, there’s going to be more opportunities for people”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 31

When considering the right to food (United Nations, 2025), questions should be asked over who has responsibility for ensuring that everyone within a population has adequate access. The 2024 Civil Society Covenant Framework advocates a *“strong, diverse, and independent civil society; and seeks to ‘harness the excellent ability of civil society to innovate and find new solutions to societal problems”* (GOV.UK, 2024). Where thematic analysis of the data has deduced that respondents felt compelled to address the multiplicity of food needs associated with the diverse communities in which they operated, this also represented a tension:

*“So, what we’re finding, we’re not getting many, other than white people, so much coming to the market. What we don’t want to do at the moment is push out advertising then they’ll turn up and there’s nothing for them”.*

Food Project Director – Participant 18



Figure 22: Restricted quantities of products available were deemed to be unsuitable for larger families.

Other stakeholders expressed that they had received feedback that the evolved models of support with food pantries did not adequately support the variety of food needs presented within a multicultural society:

*“So, this isn’t actually always for them because they want bags of rice, they want four loaves of bread, so fifteen items for £5 doesn’t meet their family needs if there’s ten or twelve of them in a household”.*

*Food Project Director – Participant 18*



*Figure 23: Example of inadequate quantities to meet needs at the start of trading.*

Subsequent themes within this research address the challenge of how sustainable community led interventions may be but as evidenced and typified by the following quote, tensions exist around supporting food authenticity needs:

*“...we’ve had feedback that it’s not ethnic enough, it’s not diverse enough.... so, in terms of long-term goals, we don’t know to be honest....so we do get like a small amount of people from those communities but they’re not coming en masse at all. And I guess that the food that we’ve got is quite British”.*

Drawing from critical discourse analysis, the incongruity between what is needed and what is offered in this instance could be interpreted as a cultural disconnect. The referencing of uncertainty as to how this might be addressed can be interpreted as a form of anxiety for the practitioner who is, arguably, trying to address a systemic problem over which they have no control. However, less generously, this could also be interpreted as the dominance of one culture over another. Power et al. (2017) found Christian-based food aid providers dominated service delivery, even in largely Muslim neighbourhoods. This could not be attributed to any differences in need and was, instead, found to be reflective of the dominance of one group's norms over another's.

A contradiction becomes evident: despite the apparent frustration, the statement suggests a reluctance to adjust their model to accommodate the specific needs of minority groups. This reluctance is counterintuitive given that proactively addressing these needs, despite the apparent smaller numbers requiring such foods, could promote equity.

Nevertheless, whilst it may be considered laudable for community-led projects to attempt to catch everyone, this, at best, may be unrealistic and, at worst, may reinforce dominant meanings and social exclusion. Food authenticity has been acknowledged as a powerful component of the sense of identity and belonging. Ruth Lister (2006) lists relational and symbolic aspects of poverty as disrespect, assault on dignity, and lack of voice, amongst others. A sense of invisibility manifests when a dominant group fails to recognise cultural expressions as a perspective. Those interviewed within this research recognised the heterogeneity of their communities whilst simultaneously acknowledging a failure to accommodate the variety of needs created by it. Despite recognition of the problem, the unavailability of food that meets food authenticity needs could be interpreted as a community not being heard and beneficiaries feeling underserved. The failure to meet food authenticity needs, including of those seeking asylum, can be considered a form of racism within the context of the right to food, particularly where practices and policies reinforce discrimination (Power and Baxter, 2024).

Drawing from fieldwork and literature, many of the researched interventions are evidently failing to meet food authenticity needs. Stakeholders highlighted challenges such as the unavailability of foods, through their supply channels, that met specific religious requirements or where their trading models do not accommodate the requirements of diverse communities. These limitations can reinforce social exclusion. However, it should also be noted that, whilst community led projects may attempt to be inclusive, this may be restricted by the resources available to them.

It is also notable that a limitation of this research is the lack of access to interventions by other faiths, and as such, the findings may not fully capture the breadth of food authenticity needs within diverse communities and how well they are being addressed overall. Taking a right to food approach, it is necessary to consider who has the responsibility for ensuring access to food that accommodates the diversity of needs in dignified ways.

As discussed, food culture can be understood as both food authenticity and food heritage. Food heritage can be interpreted as evolutionary rather than retrospective. Sandford (2019) describes heritage as ‘from the past, in the present, for the future’. Notably, food practices do not remain static; they exist on a continuum shaped by ongoing cultural exchange. There is a useful distinction between ‘cultural food’, often associated with nationality, regionality, or place-based identity, and ‘food culture’ which reflects the everyday practices and meaning embedded within food related behaviours (Jayasinghe et al., 2025). These processes are reflected within the gradual incorporation of foods and practices that were once alien to mainstream society. A clear example is the integration of South Asian cuisine into British Food Culture, with curry now widely recognised as one of the UK’s most popular dishes (Yates and Warde, 2015). Furthermore, assimilation theories suggest that the adoption of new food practices supports individuals to adapt to new circumstances, facilitating the navigation and negotiation of their place within the dominant food culture (Boch et al., 2020; Pavliukevic et al., 2018). This is not a one-way process but rather it involves a reciprocal exchange that reshapes both individual and collective food norms. As such, whilst an individual’s

cultural background will, to some extent, inevitably influence food choices, food practices remain fluid and context dependent.

These theoretical perspectives provide a basis from which cultural exchange and evolving food identities, as part of culture, itself a wider extrinsic factor of food literacy, are reflected within the findings of this research.

A range of interpretations by stakeholders on what food heritage needs might be and how these are being met by interventions exist within the data. For example, concerns might focus on places, particularly in the case of asylum seekers, and where beneficiaries were originally from; this would form a lens through which food requirements would be viewed. Such a position is valid. Food plays a major part in establishing nation building and cultural identity. For example, food may offer a positive sense of nostalgia and comfort (Evans, 2023). However, it should be noted that there may also be negative associations, particularly where food may be in short supply or the memories that a food evokes is associated with traumatic experiences (Strand, 2022).

*“we’re working with everyone – people on low incomes, single parents, people in crisis, refugees, asylum seekers, those with no recourse to public funds, we don’t ask too many questions”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 2

This response appears to be demonstrating a universal approach; the support offered is perceived by the service provider as accessible to all regardless of status or background. However, when looking more critically, the singling out of refugees and asylum seekers, within a list of beneficiaries, can be interpreted as setting these groups apart as ‘other’. Where this becomes problematic is within the evidence of both a limited amount of enquiry and that there is an unspoken contract that access involves acceptance of what is on offer regardless of individual needs. However, overall, the data shows that many providers are supportive of heterogenous food needs, particularly around adaptation of supply and making the most of what is available:

*“I used to work with (a) refugee charity...it was trying to get them not to turn their nose up to a tin of beans... to rinse off the sauce and to make them into something. You*

*know, you're cooking with products that are alien to you...why would you put slimy red sauce on a nice bean?"*

Food Pantry Customer – Participant 22

Stakeholder responses also recognised that it was potentially discriminatory to compartmentalise an individual's food needs based purely on where they might be from:

*"Just, you know, like in ours where we will one day cook a pasta, but another day and do a nice dal or a curry or whatever else".*

Community Café Volunteer – Participant 27

Others reinforced this, stating that it wasn't wholly appropriate to assume that coming from a particular place meant that one's diet was restricted to what would be considered traditional to that region:

*"In principle, there's a lot of cross contamination. I mean, in a post-positive way, generally, about food. I think people do eat each other's food and learn from each other".*

Community Café Manager – Participant 25

However, despite these progressive interpretations, discourse analysis exposes persistent contradictions in how the variety of cultural needs are framed.

*"I want to encourage the people who come to them to cook as well, so to demonstrate some cooking that they may do, because we also work with a lot of people who come from different backgrounds, different cultures. So, I've been to a lot of cooking classes, which is traditionally normally something like lasagne. It's always the same thing".*

Food Pantry Manager – Participant 32

This quote illustrates how there is often mixed messaging and confusion surrounding how interventions might meet the cultural needs of participants. The overt reference to 'coming from *different backgrounds*' is setting the intended audience apart as 'other'. Similarly, the statement 'some cooking that *they may do*' represents a potential compartmentalisation of the individual into a set of narrow food behaviours based on individual characteristics. There is also a simultaneous irony in the reference to lasagne as a traditional food. The reference to '*it's always the same thing*' references how a dish that is traditionally Italian has become such a staple within UK food culture that it is being

perceived unquestioningly as British. This provides evidence on how cultural food boundaries are drawn and redrawn; certain 'foreign' dishes have been absorbed into the mainstream whilst others remain exotic or marginalised. This raises questions about what constitutes 'difference' and how assumptions about cultural identity are being made and sustained.

Nonetheless, an ambition that was commonly evidenced within responses was being able to use extended food interventions as a vehicle for integrating communities through shared practices and experiences. Whilst the preceding quote might be critiqued as othering, it also demonstrates the desire of practitioners to facilitate cross cultural understanding using food:

*“So what we'd like to do is to encourage people to take confidence, have confidence so they can teach something as well or to lead the class even though we're going to be there, so that they can bring different, so it might be something that actually is from their culture or their past that they can't cook because they've been worried about cost of cooking those items. And we can show them how it can be cooked on a budget”.*

Cookery Class Leader - Participant 33

The encouragement of participant led classes, and the introduction of dishes that hold significance, could be perceived as shifting the dynamics within food insecure environments. Chapter five highlighted how food agendas were influencing the potential misconception of there being a lack of functional knowledge and how organisations 'parachuting in' with assumed solutions could be interpreted as a form of othering. Allowing those who are often marginalised by food insecurity to become active agents in the shaping and delivery of interventions could be interpreted as a form of resistance to othering by enabling dignity and inclusion.

However, this could also be critiqued as subtly reinforcing existing hierarchies. As the findings presented within this discussion on food culture have shown, in the first instance there may be broad assumptions being made around food preferences based solely on single demographic characteristics such as ethnicity. Secondly, drawing from critical discourse analysis, there are also several more implicit assumptions being made

that can be drawn from the statement. Despite overtly positive intentions, there is suggestion of a power dynamic, othering, or that the control and expertise should remain with the stakeholders. Phrases such as *'we're going to be there'* and *'we can show'* reinforce the notion that the 'gatekeepers' feel that they must teach or rescue despite the apparent imperative to showcase the beneficiary's expertise by experience. Additionally, the consistent use of *'they'* and *'them'* could be perceived as undermining the overall positive intention. What is initially portrayed as user led, upon deeper analysis, shows that the boundaries between stakeholder and beneficiary remain in place.

### **7.1.1 The sharing of food within the context of food insecurity**

As highlighted, food culture extends to more than *what* is eaten; it also concerns thoughts, feelings and actions around food, both individually and collectively within the social and environmental contexts in which we live (Mingay et al., 2021). This component aims to explore how food insecurity disrupts the relational dimensions of food culture. Where food becomes a medium over which social connections are facilitated, its absence can be seen as a symbol of social exclusion.

The societal aspects of food and food culture were factors identified within the integrative overview of food literacy, extending beyond knowledge and skills to include emotions, attitudes, and contexts which include social norms and cultural values (Truman and Elliot, 2018). Cullen et al. (2015) position cultural awareness and sensitivity as key to food literacy, which encompasses rituals around food, such as shared meals, hospitality and the ability to engage in social practices. It is through food practices that, oftentimes, care is shown, identity is formed, and a sense of belonging is created.

The understanding of food heritage as something shaped by cultural norms and social interactions sits closely with broader theories of exclusion, where being able to participate can reflect, and in many cases determine, the extent to which an individual feels included or shut out. For example, the social integration dimension of socio-

cultural exclusion framework (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman, 2007) includes societal participation such as contact with friends and family. Similarly, Atkinson and Hills (1998) suggest that relativity requires the comparison of circumstances of individuals, groups, or communities to others in a given place or time; demonstrably being prevented from participation within a social norm can be interpreted as a form of exclusion.

Research participants were asked how the cost-of-living crisis had influenced their behaviours and feelings surrounding shared food experiences. As with all questioning during this fieldwork, no references were made to being food insecure or experiencing poverty. This was with the intention of minimising alienation, reducing the risk of participants not self-identifying as food insecure and eliciting as honest responses as possible.

One of the most consistent narratives to emerge is that individuals withdraw from social interactions involving food because they felt unable to accommodate the cost:

*“I used to feed the kids across the road... feed the street. And now I don’t – it’s too much”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 35

Similar, responses suggested that special occasions, such as children’s birthdays, needed to be restricted or scaled down:

*“You just don’t invite as many (as) what you used to for kids’ parties... even the Swiss roll is too much”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 38

Arguably, restricting the size of a celebration to what can be afforded could be interpreted as a normal and reasonable response and therefore not illustrative of relative deprivation. However, within this context, these were responses imbued with a sense of regret that caregiving roles were unable to be fulfilled. The increased emotional burden that accompanies the inability to provide what may be considered symbolically important was evidenced by stakeholders:

*“You gave that lady a ginormous cake, and she was in tears because it was a birthday and there was no way she could have had those sorts of things. It’s actually those tiny things that make such a difference”.*

Food Pantry Manager - Participant 51

It is notable that, whilst food literacy is primarily concerned with the understanding and promotion of a healthy diet, findings emerging from this research show that there is increased importance placed on the kind of foods that symbolise indulgence. Treats and treating will be discussed in a subsequent component; but it was also suggested that, where such foods were limited by food insecurity, this was impacting upon the ability for shared intergenerational experiences that form part of childhood:

*“Yeah, it’s a joke – when the kids say that they want to bake a cake. (we) used to buy the mixes and then you’ve got to buy the eggs – eggs, don’t start me off on that”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 35

Incidentally, this quote also supports the proposition presented in Chapter 6 that it is a lack of opportunity to practice, rather than a lack of ability, that is primarily impacted by the presence of food insecurity.

Most perspectives on how rituals around food were impacted referenced the affordability of food and how that impacted the proportion of household finances that could be set aside to accommodate. However, it was also noted that reciprocity and sharing of food may also be limited by the nature of the food and its origin. Discussion within Chapter 8 explores the issues of dignity and stigma in more depth. However, as highlighted, many users continued to refer to EFAls as ‘Food Banks’. It is notable that references were made to the negative associations of produce itself. In this instance it was associated stigma with the produce, and not the process of acquisition, that minimised the extent to which beneficiaries provided hospitality. A common practice, in order to ensure that produce is rotated properly, is to date mark all the food. One stakeholder related how they had stopped the process of using the ‘big black marker pen on the top of the tins’:

*“...somebody said to me, (I) can’t have friends around because my food has got marks on it. So, they didn’t want to have people in their house and serve food and have dinner because if they saw the marks they’d know they were in trouble”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 31

The importance of being able to take pride in the food that was being offered to guests was noted by another stakeholder. In this instance, it was illustrated how what might appear to be relatively inconsequential can manifest as significantly challenging, not just for the individuals concerned but also those around them:

*“...and you definitely can’t go out and meet people, but you might not even be able to invite people around, or you may be too embarrassed because the food isn’t up to scratch.... and that leads to loneliness and dying, leads to whole other things in families. It’s bad for the kids and there’s a whole intergenerational thing”.*

Food Pantry Volunteer - Participant 16

The findings presented in this subsection have highlighted how the disruptions of food insecurity are concerned with more than inadequate quantities of food. The ability to participate in cultural practices and shared experiences is also impacted. In this context, food becomes a symbol of social exclusion. The inability to provide and fulfil traditional caregiving roles creates situations of shame and self-stigmatisation. Food Literacy must extend beyond functional and nutritional capabilities to include the capacity to engage and participate in ‘normal’ life.

The emphasis on these dimensions of cultural life scaffolds the following component which explores the practice of treating. Where dominant models and definitions of food literacy foreground physical health as an optimum (Table 1), the uptake of foods considered to be unnecessary or frivolous may be disregarded. However, in environments constrained by poverty, these foods may hold heightened symbolic importance.

### 7.1.2 The significance of treats

The process of reflexive thematic analysis exposed a significant number of references to treats. This component explores how luxuries and so-called ‘non-essentials’ are experienced and understood. It considers the significance of these items, not in terms of what they are, but what they represent, and how their inclusion or exclusion from provision speaks to wider discussion of agency, dignity, and belonging. The inclusion of ‘treating’ within the sub-theme of culture is because of the broader meaning that foods, that could otherwise be interpreted as having no nutritional value, hold within everyday rituals, as part of social interactions, and because of the symbolic meaning such foods may carry in the context of food insecurity.

This is not necessarily a novel finding but one that endures; writing about food needs in 1930s Britain, George Orwell states that ‘when you are unemployed, harassed, bored, and miserable, you don’t want to eat dull, wholesome food. You want something a little bit tasty, there is always some cheaply pleasant thing to tempt you’ (Orwell, 1937, cited in Garthwaite, 2016 pp125).

Building upon the discussion within Chapter 6 around the appropriateness of foods entering the surplus system, this section questions whether, in contexts defined by constraint, an overemphasis on nutritional content risks overlooking the very real emotional and symbolic, and arguably exponential, importance of small pleasures. Far from being frivolous, items such as cakes, biscuits, or festive foods often carry disproportionate weight where they offer moments of normality, comfort, and recognition, particularly for those whose choices may be limited in other ways. Stakeholders acknowledged that there was a pressure evident on those experiencing poverty to not be excluded from the events and rituals that form part of everyday life:

*“It was last year... so depressing when they had an article about it on Radio 4 about people using payday loans to buy Valentine's Day presents. That just makes your heart sink”.*

Food Pantry Manager - Participant 51

Taking on unaffordable debt may be considered extreme, but is reflective of profligate spending, as discussed in section 5.4.3, which drew upon scarcity theory (Achtziher, 2022) and how seemingly irrational behaviours are evidenced within experiences of poverty. However, this also evidences that symbolic acts, such as gift-giving and treating others, remain emotionally significant, even when financially irrational, reflecting deeper human needs for dignity, normalcy, and connection.

This section also aims to contribute to the research question by highlighting how food literacy cannot be understood in isolation from the broader socio-economic context in which it is to be practised. Similarly, the narrative that the choices that recipients make need to be controlled is challenged, particularly where the agency afforded to others could be construed as restricted. By drawing on social exclusion theories that consider the symbolic and relational dimensions of poverty, this component questions whether, where physical health disparities are foregrounded, other inequalities risk being exacerbated.

Where food, and a lack of it, can be particularly emotive, it is notable that the findings within this component emerged from the data without any form of direct questioning regarding this particular subject matter:

*“Because they were feeling down, depressed, and they didn’t have (anything to) cook, and they wanted a treat and all of that”.*

Cookery Class Leader - Participant 56

Food literacy has emerged from health literacy to become a distinct area of interest. This is reflected within its DNA and the demonstrable emphasis upon physical health and nutrition. However, there has also been a transition within food literacy theory; from a focus that was once largely concerned with nutrition, individual responsibility, and behaviour change towards a broader understanding that acknowledges the social, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of food (Cullen et al., 2015; Slater, 2013). This is

reflected within the conceptual framework of developed in the process of conducting this research (Figure 12).

Whilst there is evidence of heterogeneity within the customer base of food pantries in terms of demographic characteristics, there is a commonality in terms of health inequalities, levels of overweight and obesity, and the associated effects (Simmet and Stroebele-Benchop, 2019). As evidenced within the previous chapter, this can be attributed to socio-economic and structural circumstances as much as individual choice. However, there is an overarching narrative amongst many practitioners and, in particular, commissioners that extended food aid interventions should support access to and education around healthier foods only. For example, UK-based charities, in partnership with local authorities, are designing and rolling out ‘healthy only’ food pantry models (Action against Hunger, 2025). A healthy-only model, whilst well-intentioned, risks reflecting moral underclass dynamics, implies a corrective stance where recipients of food aid are positioned as needing guidance, constraint, or improvement rather than as individuals navigating complex and limiting circumstances. Similarly, that recipients of food aid should, at best, be denied the agency and, at worst, be proactively excluded from accessing the variety of foods that are freely available to others.

When considering this through the lens of social exclusion theories of poverty, which extend beyond material deprivation to encompass symbolic and relational dimensions, this presents challenges to the narrative that evolved models of food aid are increasing dignity. Levitas (2005) states that one symbol of poverty is the moral underclass discourse, which is frequently used pejoratively within political rhetoric to justify punitive welfare policies and reinforces the discourse that individualises poverty and shifts blame onto the poor, rather than addressing systemic causes.

Whilst in no way advocating that they offer a legitimate substitute for healthier options, in contexts where day-to-day life is defined by scarcity, the inclusion of treats or ‘small luxuries’ can symbolically reinforce recipients as not merely surviving but as being deserving of the same pleasures and normal consumer experiences that might be provided to others. Strategic decision-making within the provision of food aid has seen

an exponential growth of interventions that strive to achieve increased agency and, therefore, dignity for those accessing them. It could be argued, therefore, that agency should extend to what items are selected as much as how they are selected:

*“So, these are the things that people struggle to buy, so those are the little things, the treat things ... rather than it all be about the food”.*

Food Pantry Volunteer – Participant 44

The discussion within this research has questioned the efficacy of interventions in addressing the causes of food insecurity. Where food aid is intended to offer short-term relief, questions have been raised about its ability to meet the needs of those experiencing deep poverty (Tarasuk et al., 2014; Bazerghi et al., 2016, cited in Loopstra and Lalor, 2017). However, the benefit that may be leveraged by providing additional extras for those experiencing food insecurity may be exponentially greater than that for those who are not (Garthwaite, 2016). For instance, clients often express gratitude for ‘little extras’ that can break the monotony of restricted diets and affirm their worth. Loopstra and Lalor (2017) state that it is the things that seem marginal to those not living in poverty that are most important to people’s sense of self and dignity. Similarly, it is when considering restricted ‘access’ to cultural events, such as birthdays and other festive occasions, that caregivers often prioritise treats for children where possible, as a way of shielding children from the full psychological weight of poverty.



Figure 24: Volumes of confectionery at one pantry visited.

These findings were reflected in settings being operated in the most deprived areas visited and being run without any overarching agenda other than addressing the food needs of their communities as best they could. In one setting in particular, the organiser was acutely aware of the chronic poverty in which many of those accessing services were living. References were repeatedly made to how a significant part of their offer was geared towards ‘shielding’ children and young people as much as possible from the relative aspects of poverty such as being denied what may be available to others:

*“This is the ‘treaty table,’ we love it when the kids come (with) their parents ...because they can have”.*

Hyper local Food Project Leader - Participant 13

This aligns with findings from Tarasuk and Eakin (2005), who note that certain food items, whilst not nutritionally essential, hold significant and heightened emotional or symbolic value within constrained circumstances. Figure 24 shows the high volume of confectionery at one setting and can be considered reflective of the importance

stakeholders place on being able to offer small moments of happiness in largely challenging circumstances, particularly where the overall efficacy at providing sustainable solutions to the causes of poverty is limited. These items can offer a sense of normalcy, enabling parents to provide occasional indulgence or to participate in cultural rituals that may otherwise be precluded by financial hardship. The importance of this was evident within the fieldwork, depending on the time of year. Practitioners would be keenly leveraging relationships to acquire food items associated with cultural events, such as Easter eggs or Christmas gifts and confectionery:

*“...and it was Christmas ...getting loads of toys and wrapping it for the kids and then we give it out to all the people that come to us”.*

Hyper local Food Project Leader - Participant 13

The inclusion of treats or ‘luxuries’ within food aid provision, though seemingly impractical or nutritionally marginal, offers emotional relief and comfort during periods of hardship (Loopstra and Lalor, 2017). Findings within this research concur that greater significance is placed on such foods:

*“Like today we have some really nice treats ...and the delight when they come through the till...and they just feel like ‘yeah’”.*

Food Pantry Manager - Participant 14

Drawing upon critical discourse analysis, the above quote symbolises the exponential benefit that can be drawn from small things. For instance, the use of the word ‘*delight*’ is particularly significant where it evokes positivity within a largely negative context. Similarly, the ‘*and they just feel like...yeah*’ at the end of statement can be interpreted as paraphrasing a range of feelings. The absence of description is significant; the intangible impact is amplified by the fact that the respondent isn’t able to put that into words. The statement evokes a positive emotional reaction as a contrast to the negativity that may comprise normal day-to-day living. Interestingly, the emphasis upon ‘*like today*’ does imply that moments like this are occasional and reinforces the findings that inconsistent supply has a bearing on the ability for those experiencing food insecurity to be able to demonstrate food literacy by, in this instance, participating in and demonstrating cultural, extrinsic factors:

*And they're just like always grateful because they're things they can't afford those kind of treats.... And remembering someone's favourite cake is a really small thing, but actually, if that's the only treat they're getting, is a cake".*

EFAI Manager - Participant 12

Similar conclusions could be drawn from this second quote. However, it is necessary to recognise that, whilst these acts of kindness can be seen as positive, they also demonstrate the tensions that exist between community and civil society. A caring, supporting role is performed whilst potentially, unintentionally, reinforcing dependency and inequality. References to gratitude, for example, could be interpreted as undignified where they indicate how one party is in some way beholden to another.

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) has critiqued donation models where guidelines exclude treats, noting that this assumes that food aid recipients should only receive the bare minimum. This could be a form of 'moral surveillance' (Garthwaite, 2016) and reflective of some of the EFAIs highlighted within the previous chapter which deny the recipient agency and choice. Similarly, this could be considered to be perpetuating a form of relative poverty (Townsend, 1979 cited in Mack, 2025) where there is an expectation that those in receipt of food aid should somehow be expected to exist on a bare minimum or on what is necessary for survival only.

The UN define the right to food as 'when every man, woman and child, alone, and in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or the means for its procurement' (Riches, 2018) and whilst this is primarily concerned with a quality and quantity to satisfy dietary needs, attention is also paid to the fact that the accessibility of food is achieved in ways that do not interfere with the enjoyment of other human rights.

### **7.1.3 Conclusion to food culture sub-theme**

This subsection has explored how food literacy within the context of food insecurity extends beyond individual behaviours or functional skills. Whilst dominant models

propose food literacy as a set of tasks such as preparation, budgeting, label reading, or meal planning (Block et al., 2011; Perry et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2019; Vidgen and Gallegos, 2014), these findings indicate a broader, more socially embedded perspective. Food is shown to hold symbolic, emotional, and cultural significance that is used to care, to connect, and to express identity. However, in a context shaped by food insecurity, these practices are constrained.

As others argue (Cullen et al., 2015; Truman and Elliot, 2018), food literacy is not only about knowing how to cook or what nutrients food contains, but also about participating in culturally relevant food practices. Where participation is denied or becomes inaccessible, normality, dignity, and belonging are at risk. These findings illustrate how the inability to engage in everyday food rituals, such as preparing culturally significant meals, celebrating events, or simply feeding others, can generate a sense of exclusion that mirrors broader experiences of marginalisation. This discussion aligns with the findings of Dowler and O'Connor (2012), who argue that the inability to enact food behaviours becomes not only a symptom of poverty but also a source of shame.

Practitioners could be critiqued for making assumptions about food preferences based on fixed notions of need, and in the case of food authenticity, these needs are more rigid. However, food heritage, in this context, is not so rigid. Rather, it evolves through interaction, is shaped by new surroundings, social pressures, and the desire to belong. These adaptations do not equate to the loss of cultural identity but instead highlight how food heritage is constantly negotiated and redefined.

## **7.2 Food Education**

As discussed within Chapter 6, at the heart of food literacy lie intrinsic factors that encompass declarative and functional knowledge. Declarative knowledge is the factual information related to food, such as nutrition principles, food safety guidelines, or understanding where food comes from. In essence, the knowing '*what*' of food literacy.

Functional knowledge concerns the knowing ‘*how*’ and concerns application. For instance, planning meals, cooking, budgeting, and using ingredients efficiently.

The presentation of findings and discussion within this sub-theme aims to explore how this knowledge is exchanged or acquired. It is the *process of food education* that qualifies this as an extrinsic factor, rather than the knowledge itself, which, as discussed, is intrinsic. How this process may, or may not, take place responds directly to the research question of how food insecurity interlinks with food literacy. Drawing upon theories of social exclusion, this sub-section also questions whether any absence of food literacy should therefore be perceived as a matter of individual deficiency or as an outcome of systemic inequalities.

### **7.2.1 Access to formal food education and socio-economic barriers**

It is argued that experiences of poverty and food insecurity create a barrier to formal food education. It has been shown that inelastic household finances constrain the quality and volume of purchases made for the household. Drawing from responses within the research data, it can be argued that this also extends to limiting the opportunity to participate in school-based learning.

Within the integrative overview of food literacy (Appendix A) the act of educating does not appear extensively. As a component of food literacy, Block et al. (2011) reference education directly, which is echoed by Bublitz et al. (2011). Cullen et al. (2015) use ‘programmes’ as terminology into which education could also fit. This, in itself, could be interpreted as a form of pedagogical blindness (Vadivel et al., 2023), where the focus is on outcomes without consideration of the practicalities of how this knowledge is acquired. Food literacy models that do not accommodate or consider the systemic inequities around education risk reinforcing the narrative that a lack of food literacy is because of a personal deficit rather than an effect of the education being assumed to be equally accessible. The data collected in this research suggest a strong relationship between experiences of poverty and barriers to participation in formal food education:

*“...sadly, poverty goes alongside... issues around schooling and access of schooling. So, you don't have the education about it. It's not because people in deprived areas are less intelligent, it's just because they've got less access to resources on all levels, including education”.*

Food Pantry Customer – Participant 22

This stakeholder observation, which signposts how experiences of deprivation often include disenfranchisement from formal education, is supported by other responses within the research data following questioning on how, and from where, food skills were learnt.

Frequently, when questioned about participation in school-based food education, the impacts of poverty were referenced. The already overstretched household's spending meant that there was no available money to support the purchase of additional ingredients. Similarly, there would not already be the ingredients in reserve at home that could be provided. This scarcity created a reluctance to risk resources for the purposes of home economics lessons:

*“I just assumed, because when I was at school, I could go to the cupboard and get my flour for domestic science (or) my mum would just go off and get it. But for people on a budget, it was like, there's no way... we've already not got enough to feed ourselves”.*

Food Pantry Customer – Participant 22

This additional challenge is echoed in responses from a focus group of community cookery class attendees:

*“Cooking on the Tuesday, I used to dread going home and saying to my mum and dad, have you got some (money for) cooking on the Tuesday? Because you know, you scrape the money together”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 36

These quotes and data illustrate how food insecurity and poverty create a structural barrier to formal food education, not because of a lack of interest or ability, but because of practical constraints. Economic precarity leads to difficult decisions regarding household expenditure, meaning that participation in food lessons cannot be prioritised

for fear of ‘wasting’ scarce resources. McKendrick et al. (2023) also find cost to be a significant barrier to participation, with the majority of schools requiring pupils to pay for, contribute towards, or provide ingredients. It was found that many practitioners felt this to be unfair when these expectations were viewed in comparison to other subjects, such as art or science.

Using critical discourse analysis, this quote exemplifies how potential participation in a school cookery lesson, whilst seemingly trivial, becomes something that is emotionally charged on a repetitive basis. The response repeats the fact that ‘*cooking was on a Tuesday*’, which indicates that this was a consistent pressure and not a one-off. When combined with the overt emotional reference of ‘*dread*’, it illustrates the additional emotional burden placed on the learner associated with acquiring the resources to participate, with the potential additional tension that failure to do so would result in negative repercussions from teachers. The phrase ‘*you scrape the money together*’ reflects more than frugality; in this instance, it evokes the lived experience of financial precarity. Significantly, what on the surface appears to be a simple objective: supporting participation in a universal learning experience, becomes a source of tension that brings the young person up close to the effects of poverty.

The result is a form of structural othering, where food education is effectively reserved for those who already have the means to engage with it. The marginalisation of learners from low-income households from this aspect of the curriculum risks reinforcing narratives that portray them as disengaged or deficient rather than having been denied access. As identified with the theoretical foundations that inform this research, access to governments and semi-government provisions is a fundamental social right; inadequate access is a direct form of social exclusion (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman, 2007).

Begley et al. (2017) argue that only one of the four pillars of food security is person-centred and modifiable through education, that being utilisation. Systemic change is required to support increased access, availability, and stability, but arguably, within this

scenario, systemic change is also needed to support participation in the education process.

### 7.2.2 Questioning the efficacy and relevance of formal food education

Whilst section 7.2.1 highlighted how poverty and food insecurity act as significant barriers to participation in formal food education, this part of the analysis turns to the content and perceived applicability of food curricula within schools. Emerging from the data is a strong sense of frustration and disconnection. Where food education had been accessed, the content was perceived as not reflecting lived realities or having usefulness within day-to-day life.

As highlighted above, a narrative existed within the data suggesting disenfranchisement with formal channels of education:

*“On top of that it's even worse. The system is so middle class and skewed in the education that a lot of people in difficult situations feel pi\*\*ed off about it and just say well they must be s\*\*t coming from these stupid teachers that have been wagging their finger at us forever”.*

Community Café Manager – Participant 25

Drawing upon critical discourse analysis, this quote from a practitioner is revealing and deeply critical of the systemic inequalities faced by those experiencing disadvantage. The phrase ‘the system is so middle class’ directly challenges the applicability of the education system for all and suggests that the curriculum is designed to support, or is ‘skewed’ towards, middle-class norms and values. This implies alienation and systemic exclusion. Here, education, which is typically viewed as a route to ‘betterment’, is being perceived as a form of cultural dominance. Significantly, there is also a sense of fatalism demonstrated; the statement ‘*these stupid teachers that have been wagging their fingers at us forever*’, for example, suggests that this scepticism is the result of inequalities perpetuated, and sustained across generations and a mistrust of the teachers who, arguably, act as agents of the state in the eyes of those who are most impacted by these ongoing inequalities.

Across the research data, multiple responses indicate that there is a sense that what is being taught is inadequate in equipping young people with the basic skills needed to cook for themselves:

*“There’s not enough cooking. There’s definitely not enough proper cooking lessons that actually teach them how to cook... I hate food technology... what (a) stupid topic when people can’t even cook their own pasta or boil an egg. Like hell no; sorry no”.*

Community Café Manager – Participant 25

As identified within Chapter 2, the teaching of cookery in school has been problematised, undergoing several name changes that reflect ongoing uncertainty over its departmental positioning and intended societal role. For example, titles such as home economics, domestic science, and food and nutrition were names given dependent on what outcomes might be sought (Caraher et al., 2010; Slater et al., 2018). Latterly, when identifiable as ‘food technology’, foci would include product or packaging design. This quote exemplifies how this ‘identity crisis’ has resulted in a subject that does little to equip learners with everyday competencies.

Other responses support this, highlighting the sense amongst research participants that there is a disconnect between what is taught in schools and what may be considered useful:

*“Let’s be honest, I came out of school, and they taught me how to do like pizza on baguette, that’s not real is it?”*

Youth Food Project Trainer - Participant 23

This critique could be perceived as suggesting that the subject has become tokenistic and lacking in any impact; a sentiment repeated across the research data by several stakeholders:

*“They had years of neglect where(as) when I was at school, you cooked everything from scratch. My kids were like doing a topping of a pizza or making a fruit salad. So, there’s years, generations, where the kids haven’t got those skills”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 36

*She's done five years in college, independent living, but she still can't, five years independent living in college and still cannot cook".*

Youth Food Project Trainer - Participant 24

In one instance, a beneficiary reflected upon how the subject had been devalued, and was arguably reserved for those who were not performing academically:

*"In my school, you were only allowed to do it if you were in the bottom set".*

Cookery Class Leader - Participant 33

The data consistently shows frustration and disenfranchisement with school food education amongst both beneficiaries and stakeholders. However, this narrative may also serve as a justification for interventions by proponents of cookery interventions, suggesting potential bias.

These findings could be interpreted as a product of the underdeveloped or inconsistent provision, as evidenced by Caraher et al. (2010) and Slater et al. (2018). The apparent lack of focus on what may be considered beneficial could be regarded as reflective of an education system informed by a neoliberal agenda, where work and economic outputs take precedence over caregiving, domestic labour, and community wellbeing (Himmelweit, 2007). Where the use of automation and technology enters food production, the focus of food education shifts towards skilling a workforce, as evidenced by the food technology curriculum (Caraher, 2010). However, as the following quote illustrates, this potentially widens systemic inequalities:

*"My thinking is that we are all deskilled when it comes to cooking. Some of us can afford to buy our way out. Some of us can buy the kind of pre-prepared ingredients or this or that, and the other. Some of us can't".*

Food Charity Trustee – Participant 58

'We are all deskilled' promotes the idea that changes to food education within the UK mean that there is a universal lack of functional knowledge, but to what extent is

unclear. However, disparities between groups are suggested in how this is dealt with. Those with the economic capital, it is suggested, have the means with which to substitute skills for higher-priced, prepared but healthier products. Those who are financially excluded become 'exposed' by a lack of skills. As discussed, this risks poorer diets and fewer skills being interpreted as individual failure rather than having, potentially, been let down by inadequacies within the education system.

### **7.2.3 Informal and necessity-based learning**

Chapter 6 considered how misplaced the narrative that people experiencing food insecurity lack functional food literacy might be. Responses within the research data also suggest that the absence of formal food education does not necessarily equate to a lack of functional knowledge. In fact, for many participants in this research, the acquisition of knowledge occurred outside formal education channels and was driven by necessity and the circumstances introduced by poverty. Notably, limited access due to financial constraints does not appear to have prevented the development of practical food skills amongst the beneficiaries of extended food aid interventions participating within this research. Data from beneficiary focus groups show that the ability to cook was not an optional or academic exercise, but a basic survival skill and a means of ensuring they, and those around them, could eat:

*“... my mum left us...so I learned really young about the value of things. We were taught always the value of things, to look after things because they didn't grow on trees and. .... I was taught how to make a shepherd's pie, you know, the basics. And then I could always cook basic foods”.*

Food Pantry Volunteer – Participant 44

Indeed, skills would be acquired as a response to the circumstances of daily life as several responses indicated that lower household incomes would necessitate both parents to be working, or in some instances, parents to be working multiple jobs. This required older siblings to assume caregiving roles or to be self-sufficient at an early age:

*“I just started doing it after school because my mum worked full time and my dad did and I just started doing it then preparing stuff and helping and then when I was a mum, just did it”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 37

*“I had no choice, you always had to feed the younger kids, so you have to learn to cook if there wasn’t an adult”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 38

Other quotes indicate how families may not be in a position where they could support children any longer than was feasible:

*“Yeah, Yeah, we just had to learn cooking and cleaning and sewing. If you didn’t know how to move out and do that, then you were screwed”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 35

These findings reflect those existing within the literature (Meah and Watson, 2011; McLaughlin et al., 2003; Silva et al., 2023), where it is argued that functional food literacy is often misrepresented in policy and discourse as something lacking amongst certain groups. Arguably, it is more frequently and intensely practised than assumed, albeit in potentially different ways. As within the discussion concerning the intrinsic factors of food literacy, there may be a distance between various groups on how ‘cooking’ is defined, dependent upon the variety of processes and products involved. The lack of participation in structured teaching does not necessarily equate to an absence of skills, although it must also be stated that this does not necessarily equate to a nutritionally balanced diet.

As discussed within Chapter 6, research data indicate that although top-level declarative knowledge was evidenced across the research sample, a more specific understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet and the variety of ways in which it might be achieved was lacking. Similarly, as indicated by Begley et al. (2019), the impact of systemic inequalities, such as availability and access, will have a bearing on how individual skills will be utilised; therefore, the individual competency of utilisation cannot be solely relied upon to address health inequities.

#### **7.2.4 Conclusions to the food education sub-theme**

The findings and discussion regarding formal food education have explored the complex and multifaceted interactions between food insecurity and food literacy. Attention has been drawn to how experiences of poverty and social exclusion shape access to food-related knowledge and skills. The findings challenge the downstream narrative that frames a lack of food literacy as an individual deficiency (Poelman et al., 2018); instead, it is argued that this may better be understood as a failing introduced by structural barriers, socio-economic constraints, and exclusionary systems of education.

Significantly, these findings highlight how food literacy itself, and how it is acquired, must be understood as related but distinct elements. Limited access to resources plays a pivotal role in determining who participates in formal education but the skills and knowledge themselves may nonetheless be acquired through necessity.

Formal food education has been revealed as not only inaccessible, mainly due to poverty, but also inappropriate. This has been evidenced within participant responses regarding the nature of foods being prepared but also by scepticism from stakeholders about the efficacy of the education system at addressing systemic inequalities. This disconnect could be perceived as perpetuating a cycle of othering where exclusion, due to inadequate systems, is portrayed as an individual failing.

What has been shown is that, despite apparent exclusion, many participants developed functional food literacy skills outside of formal channels. These skills were often acquired out of necessity, created by wider experiences of poverty. Arguably, these demonstrate the 'resilience' that Vidgen and Gallegos (2014) propose food literacy promotes. In frequently constrained circumstances, where access and availability of health-promoting foods are limited, this utilisation could be interpreted as adaptability. Sims-Schouten and Gilbert (2022) define resilience as a dynamic process that leads to positive adaptations within the context of significant adversity; however, they also

indicate that resilience, particularly within the context of education and neoliberalism, is problematic. Resilience can be applied in ways that are biased and stigmatising in particular, where there is potential to disadvantage certain groups and where power structures and inequality are ignored. Similarly, Cretney (2014) finds that, where resilience can refer to a desire to successfully respond to disruptions outside of the status quo, it is often overused with a lack of concern for the power or lack of agency that might be creating such an imbalance.

Again, applying a lens of social exclusion where it is not simply about not having resources but about being denied full participation (Levitas, 2005), the restriction of educational opportunities can be interpreted as a form of marginalisation. Similarly, where formal food education seeks to influence and support economic outputs, this could be interpreted as privileging the middle classes and widening existing gaps.

### **7.3 Food Systems**

Food systems accommodate the total breadth of actors involved in and with the interlinked activities that add value to the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food (Nguyen, 2018). A sustainable food system should deliver food security and nutrition for all in a way that does not compromise the economic, social, and environmental bases for future generations' food security and nutrition. Food security and food systems are fundamentally characterised by social and economic change, such as food production, the growth of food processing and packaging, and the exponential growth of urban food consumers (Ericksen, 2008).

The integrative overview of food literacy (Appendix A) exposed propositions that expand conceptualisations of food literacy beyond individual skills, knowledge, and behaviours to consider the broader food systems within which people make food-related decisions. Thomas et al. (2019) and Truman and Elliot (2019), for example, stress the importance of *understanding* food systems as a necessary part of food literacy. Similarly, Krause et al.

(2018) propose that factors that influence food choice should be critically reflected upon, particularly regarding their impact on society. Slater et al. (2018) indicated that food literacy requires an understanding of elements of social justice, environmental and food corporate issues.

The aim of this sub-theme is to provide findings and discussion relating to the understanding and importance placed on matters relating to food systems, as evidenced within the research data. In line with the social constructivist ontology of this research, the data collection process was deliberately unstructured with the purpose of eliciting participant responses that reflected what was of importance to them rather than the researcher. A process of reflexive thematic analysis was undertaken, where factors from the integrative overview of components of food literacy were used as a codebook to support inductive coding.

A finding of significance, for this research, is that the amount of discussion relating to food systems that can be analysed is proportionately lower than that relating to other themes and sub-themes. This in itself could be reflective of the compromises having to be made when 'choosing' household provisions within the context of food insecurity and mirrors existing research findings that food insecurity significantly limits the ability of individuals and households to make sustainable food choices. Eicher-Miller et al. (2023), for example, find that limited resources necessitate the prioritisation of affordability at the expense of environmentally friendly or long-term health considerations.

The findings and discussion presented within other themes have drawn upon the responses of front-line practitioners as a proxy for those accessing services; this has been justified where previous research suggests that the associated stigma of accessing food aid may act as a barrier to beneficiaries 'opening up' about potentially difficult and painful parts of their life to a researcher who is a relative stranger. The knowledge acquired by the practitioner from the beneficiary over a longer period is likely to be less inhibited or prone to response bias than responses between researcher and beneficiary directly (Smith and Thompson, 2023). In contrast, within this theme, particular care has been taken in analysing responses from stakeholders with overarching environmental

agendas, in order to mitigate the risk that stakeholder priorities or concerns are implicitly communicated as beneficiary perspectives, thereby reducing the justification for the use of a proxy in this context.

To illustrate, having an overarching environmental agenda may be considered a bias in this context, as evidenced in the quote below:

*“(The Food Bank) was one arm of the project, along with the growing and the cooking workshops and things like that. .... We took it over; it was still in here. And we thought for the first few weeks we just take it over as is and monitor it. Have a look at how it’s run. What do we think about it? And quite early on we just realised it wasn’t quite us, it wasn’t quite what we had in mind for a nice, sustainable food economy”.*

Food Project Customer – Participant 19

As explained within section 4.4.4, much of the produce utilised by the interventions participating in this research was accessed from ‘food rescue’ channels such as FareShare. This produce would either be resold at discounted prices or repurposed into meals for community cafés and cookery classes. It was evident at some interventions that the diversion of food away from landfills was being promoted as their primary purpose. Other settings would be using the repurposed food to promote and sell plant-based dishes. In these instances, the alleviation of food insecurity was a secondary outcome. This was achieved by attaching lower retail prices to the ‘repurposed’ food, which increased their affordability for customers on limited incomes. These ‘green credentials’, combined with a customer base accessing for reasons other than food insecurity, were also perceived to reduce the levels of stigma associated with food banks (FareShare, 2025).

For example, customers at one setting would be at pains to state how they were shopping because of the ‘environmental aspect of it’:

*“Because at first, I thought, maybe I shouldn’t be coming. I’m not on benefits, and then talking to the staff it’s incorporating everyone in the community, I think that is really good, that everybody feels they can”.*

Food Project Customer – Participant 19

There is clear evidence of an understanding amongst individuals of the environmental impacts of food waste and how personal behaviours interact with wider food systems and, as such, extrinsic factors of food literacy (Krause et al., 2018; Slater et al., 2018; Truman and Elliot, 2018). However, food insecurity has been shown to reduce the prioritisation of food choices, which as an example of reduced agency can be viewed as a form of relative poverty. It is unclear whether the key driver for accessing food pantries is rooted in a commitment to sustainability or simply the need for affordability. As discussed in relation to cultural aspects of food, the urgency to secure affordable food often overrides any moral or ethical concerns beneficiaries may have (Salonen, 2016). This raises an important question: even when there is an awareness of the need to make more sustainable food choices, are the means to do so realistically available? In this context, sustainability appears to fall down the list of priorities, which indicates that it is unlikely to be a primary motivating factor for many individuals accessing extended food aid interventions.

In general, where they arose, beneficiary responses indicated that consideration of the environmental impact of food choices was simply unrealistic:

*“You can't even afford environmental thinking, yeah, it's too expensive. Anything that they want to say to you is better for the environment or better. It's better for that. You can't afford it anyway”.*

Community Café Customer - Participant 11

As per the discussion in Chapter 6 relating to the application of functional knowledge, this also reflects how food insecurity acts as a barrier, not to knowing per se, but to putting knowledge into practice. Within this instance, there is less of a demonstrable narrative that portrays failure to enact behaviours as an individual failing. However, a narrative emerges from this research data that suggests the promotion of behaviours that could be perceived as supporting food systems at a local, national, or global level, without acknowledging the circumstances created by an absence of resources.

For example, one stakeholder from a youth project related that they were often a targeted recipient of educational resources that supported with vegetable growing initiatives:

*“We used to get food boxes from sort of organisations that did healthy growing, and they sent us these food boxes and when you looked at it, there was very little in there that the youngsters could take away and cook. You've got to get them cooking first to get them through to that sort of stage. These schemes sound great but what we're doing now with them (is) looking and seeing do they actually work?”*

Young people's centre manager - Participant 22

Using critical discourse analysis, the phrase ‘*organisations that did healthy growing*’ points to initiatives that are grounded in food systems thinking, particularly through emphasising sustainable production and healthy eating. However, these schemes appear to be disconnected from the everyday realities and capabilities of the young people they aim to support. Whilst the positive intention is appreciated – ‘*these schemes sound great...*’ it is also indicated that they are perceived as out of touch with the practical needs and constraints of service users.

The following quotes illustrate how some stakeholders’ ideological positions are distanced from the socioeconomic realities of beneficiaries:

*“...But through more than just money, it's also, you know, more training... More growing, you know, locally, more getting people to maybe grow at home. You know, there's a whole load of things. More composting... a strategy that's including climate change and environmental emergency and all this sort of stuff, and taking into account, because, you know, we do know food poverty might be a much bigger issue because (there) just won't be enough food .... So, I would definitely look at that and I think that is a good, good example of what can be done”.*

Community Café Manager – Participant 25

Chapter 1 noted that there is an extent of crossover between food security and food insecurity as terms concerning the availability of food at the population level and the individual level. Dillon and Wentworth (2024) indicate that food systems approaches to *food security* are generally considered valid in the sense that they recognise food insecurity as a systemic rather than an individual issue. Similarly, Ingram (2011) highlight

how, without a food systems approach, there will be heightened challenges in meeting societal demands for food. The quote above evidences how a variety of initiatives could begin to address many of the challenges; in particular, how current mechanisms of food production and supply risk a future shaped by ecological instability and potential food shortages on a global scale.

However, as the following quote suggests, beneficiaries contributing to this research indicate that the socio-economic circumstances in which they live constrain the ability to enact many of these proposed actions. Poor housing or access to green space, for example, preclude the ability to grow at scale. Perhaps more significantly, this quote also expresses how this is representative of an assumed lack of contextual understanding by those proposing solutions:

*“....So, I live in a tower block. We have a balcony. We don’t have access to the ground. Me and my daughter, like, I’d grow, like, herbs and tomatoes, and I think they’re called yellow zucchini or something on my balcony, but that isn’t a diet. And that isn’t, like, you can’t just live off of that. So, I think these kind of dismissive approaches, coupled with the kind of distance from people that are. They don’t really get what it, what it is like to live like that”.*

Food Insecurity Campaigner - Participant 1

Whilst not directly related to food insecurity, the following quote refers to issues regarding environmental behaviours, such as how waste is dealt with and comes from a focus group following a community cookery session and powerfully exemplifies the everyday conflicts experienced:

*“I do believe in recycling. The problem is I saw a documentary about what actually happens to the plastic. It gets sent to China. And then there's some poor kid burning and going up in the atmosphere....But we're just offsetting it. We're just sending it somewhere else. We're gonna get fined if we don't recycle. But we know what's actually happening with recycling. It's a bit of a con. But I still do it, though, because I don't want to be fined”.*

Cookery Class Attendee - Participant 35

Drawing upon critical discourse analysis, a deep ambivalence regarding environmental responsibility is revealed. In the first instance, the respondent acknowledges their responsibilities, which indicates both an understanding and conscience regarding behaviours. However, this very quickly turns to a sense of disillusionment and discomfort. Referencing the *'offsetting'* of waste and the passing on of the problem to elsewhere can be interpreted as acknowledgement of the apparent futility of the situation. This is emphasised by the expression of empathy towards the *'poor kid'* that may, in this instance, also be interpreted as someone with whom the respondent identifies.

Most significantly, it is within the statements *'We're gonna get fined'*, *'I still do it though'*, *'We know what's actually happening'* and *'it's a bit of con'* that a deeper narrative of mistrust begins to emerge. This could be interpreted as vocalising their frustration with regards to being penalised for not enacting behaviours at an individual level that will have little impact on a global systemic level. Arguably, this could be considered metaphorical for the general situation of the respondent; they are often required to enact individual behaviours as a result of their socioeconomic context over which they have little control. Factors of social exclusion have been identified as a lack of power and little or no control of exogenous forces for those who are excluded (Room, 1995 cited in Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman, 2007).

### **7.3.1 Conclusion to food systems sub-theme**

The findings and discussion presented have highlighted how there is an evident tension between the ambitions of advocates of food systems thinking and the constrained realities of those experiencing food insecurity. Whilst environmentally driven interventions may achieve dual outcomes: for example, waste reduction and improved access to lower priced produce, the capacity of individuals to meaningfully engage is more likely to be shaped by concerns of affordability than by a contribution to wider systems.

What emerges from the data is not a rejection of environmental concerns and responsibilities but rather a recognition that the agency with which to act upon them becomes limited. This is accompanied by a possible cynicism that efforts are generally in vain, which could be interpreted as reproducing factors of social exclusion.

#### **7.4 Summary of findings and discussion relating to extrinsic factors**

The findings presented within this chapter underscore that food literacy extends well beyond consideration of knowledge and skills and must be understood as culturally embedded and socially negotiated. Drawing on accounts provided by those delivering and accessing the EFAls included in this study, it is evident that the extrinsic dimensions of food literacy are shaped by, and in turn shape, experiences of agency, identity, and access as illustrated across the sub-themes of food culture, food education, and food systems.

In response to the research question that asks how food insecurity interlinks with food literacy, it has been shown that it is potentially around failure to address the extrinsic factors of food literacy, where social exclusion (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman, 2007) may be most felt. Firstly, as a form of relational, socio-cultural exclusion, the inability to participate in the rites and rituals associated with participation in social networks is limited. Secondly, where consumer priorities over affordability and volume limit the ability to comply with the norms and values related to active citizenship, for example, where the rejection of sustainable and environmental choices is necessitated in situations of financial hardship. Structural exclusion is also present where food insecurity acts as a barrier to social rights, such as education.

Where this research seeks to explore the role of the extended food aid intervention in responding to potential deficits of food literacy, it is around the extrinsic, rather than intrinsic factors, that the most impact may be felt. Findings and discussion relating to extended food aid interventions will be explored in Chapter 8.

## Chapter 8- Extended Food Aid Interventions: Challenges and Wider Roles

### 8.0 Introduction to chapter

This research has been conducted within the context of extended food aid interventions, as defined within section 4.5. It is regarding the role of the intervention and its impact on experiences of food insecurity and supporting food literacy, on which the findings and discussion of this Chapter will focus.

Drawing on a process of reflexive thematic analysis, four core sub-themes emerge and are presented and discussed within this chapter. The first considers how spaces of provision may influence access and inclusion, leading to how extended food aid interventions potentially function as spaces of belonging. Chapter 7 evidenced how food insecurity limits the opportunity to take part in the behaviours and rituals that form part of food culture. How the extended food aid intervention can be seen to be replicating those diminished functions will be examined.

Findings and discussion then explore the extent to which there may be, more broadly, a potential desensitisation and normalisation of food aid, interrogating what this means for the preservation of dignity and reduction of stigma within extended food aid settings. For example, it is of note that within the responses of many of the beneficiaries contributing to this research, ‘food bank’ was used as a catch-all terminology for all extended food aid interventions regardless of how they were framed or rebranded by stakeholders which suggests distance between the narratives of each group. For clarity, this research has been conducted within EFAI’s but quotes have been transcribed verbatim.

Finally, following the application of critical discourse techniques, the chapter contributes to an emerging area of research regarding food insecurity and interventions to address it. Exploration of moral injury and vicarious trauma questions the

sustainability of interventions and how those working within them navigate complex moral dilemmas.

## **8.1 Spaces of food provision as barriers to access**

Building on the discussion within Chapter 7 on food culture and the challenges of meeting diverse needs within extended food aid interventions, this section turns attention to the spaces from which such support is delivered. As discussed within that chapter, food carries meaning beyond its nutritional value, holds significance within the adherence to religious beliefs, and contributes to cultural identity. Findings within this research also suggest that the setting from which food aid is sought may have a bearing on accessibility. In particular, the belief systems of those providing and those accessing may present a source of tension.

Spaces can either facilitate or inhibit access (Power, 2022). Characteristics of the physical setting, organisational affiliation, and community expectations all contribute to shaping the experiences of support. Returning to the social constructivist lens and theories of social exclusion, this section considers how spaces that may appear neutral can, in practice, be anything but, depending on who is requiring access to support.

Rahman (2023) argues that the design, use, and governance of public spaces reflect a community's values, beliefs, and priorities. This also encompasses power dynamics and cultural norms which can result in the exclusion and discrimination of marginalised groups. Whilst not always overt, findings indicate that cultural norms and moral expectations within and between communities are felt. The right to food with dignity and without judgment extends not only to what is 'given' but also to where and how it is given. In doing so, the discussion presented here shows that food insecurity extends beyond access to food and is inextricably intertwined within social context, symbolic meaning, and the relational dynamics between giver, space, and recipient.

The UN right to food (United Nations, 2025) emphasises that access to food must be culturally appropriate and provided in a dignified way; fundamentally individual and cultural traditions must be respected and there should be an absence of stigma. The right to food includes ensuring that provision is made, not just for nutritional adequacy, but for how food is acquired and consumed. In particular, within the right to food there should be an avoidance of situations where individuals feel stigmatised or shamed.

Responses within the data indicate that the spaces from which interventions are delivered may influence, for certain groups, the accessibility of the support on offer. The apparent lack of diversity within beneficiary groups accessing interventions was reflected in the responses from this practitioner, albeit with a degree of inferred frustration that, despite efforts, uptake was low. If food authenticity, for example, is as concerned with factors beyond the food, as much as the food itself, this could be considered representative of how interventions may be failing to accommodate:

*“On the estate, we are multicultural, estate huge. And trying to integrate with others is really, really difficult. .... We’ve got Muslims, we’ve got Sikhs, we’ve got Hindus and its quite a big community.... we want to be integrated but then they put these huge rules around themselves”.*

Food Pantry Volunteer – Participant 44

It is of significance that the venue in which this practitioner worked was on the site of a former social club, and much of the décor of its former incarnation had remained. It was acknowledged by stakeholders that this may be presenting a barrier for some groups; for example, the team were looking to paint out signage pertaining to alcohol etc. to create chalkboards. This also exemplified how the cultural needs of some groups were not being met by food aid interventions where, for example, it would be considered inappropriate to be entering licensed premises, albeit no longer operational. Where it is suggested that food culture extends to practices and social norms (Jayasinghe et al.,2025; Mingay et al. 2021) there may be additional barriers presented by interventions being delivered from sites that may present moral, spiritual, or ethical barriers.

As stated within Chapter 7, a potential perceived limitation of this research is the lack of access to organisations of faith other than Christian. Within the adopted social constructivist ontology of this research, the following findings and discussion are reflective of the realities and social and historical perspectives of those contributing (Mackinnon et al., 2014). The findings discussed below are drawn from fieldwork conducted in Christian settings. It is of note that these findings may not be universal to all faiths.

Safety was proposed as a fifth pillar of food security within Chapter 6. Many of the projects visited were operated by faith-based organisations and, whilst in no way overtly excluding certain groups, there was a suggestion that this may present an invisible barrier to accessing support in comparison to non-secular interventions for some.

For example, in 2025, the UK Supreme Court ruled that under the Equality Act ‘a woman’ means ‘a biological woman’. Whilst, in principle, this doesn’t directly impact access to food interventions, a repercussion from the ruling is that increased confusion and fear exist within the trans community and, significantly, elevated concerns that those with transphobic views may feel emboldened (Schofield, 2025). For instance, it was related how a member of the trans community had shared that following the ruling, they would ‘absolutely not’ access support from a church, despite it being available, for fear of judgement or refusal because of their trans identity as there were negative associations with the church and its congregation for this person.

Visual field notes further contextualise this response. As illustrated in Figure 25, food pantries operating within religious settings are often embedded in spaces marked by overt religious iconography, which can signal particular moral, cultural, or ideological positions. This is demonstrably reflective of the concept of lived space (Salonen, 2016) which, for some, is perceived not only physically but also imbued with meaning that is shaped by social position, identity, and past experience.



Figure 25: Religious iconography in spaces where food pantries operate.

In addition, stakeholders operating a food pantry and community café from a church were asked whether they felt that the setting from which it operated might be impeding access in any way:

*“I mean, my firm answer to the question of is it exclusive? Being in the church building is no”.*

Community Food Space Volunteer - Participant 30

This response was not dissimilar to others operating from similar venues:

*“....and I think if you speak to people honestly, the majority of them are not from the church. Church background might have had quite negative experiences, but they wouldn’t feel that. And now they also feel that this is their church, and this is their place”.*

Vicar / EFAI Project Coordinator - Participant 28

In general, those stakeholders responding to exploration around how overtly Christian spaces might influence who does, and importantly who doesn’t, access felt that the issue of whether you were a regular attendee of church services was irrelevant. It was

suggested that church should be considered ‘a small c’ as in community rather than church as in religion. These sentiments reflect the findings of Salonen (2016) whereby, for the most part, recipients of food aid found the religious nature of the space from which services were accessed to be unimportant. Others equated what they were doing to being part of a family:

*“It is what it is, isn’t it? It is family... and we try to make our friends and visitors coming in feel part of that family. It doesn’t matter whether you come to church on a Sunday actually. They identify that this is their church even if they don’t come on a Sunday”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 12

The provision of food aid interventions could be interpreted as the manifestation of the Christian doctrine of ‘helping the poor and needy’ (Cairns et al., 2007; Power et al., 2017). For those delivering, there is an overarching message of openness and universal access, regardless of a belief system being practiced or not. One stakeholder went so far as to suggest that the provision of food aid had become such a pressing need that it has superseded any form of other ministry:

*“Food was in such immediate need; churches pivoted to providing (for) that need and stopped providing the wider support”.*

Social Supermarket Trustee - Participant 52

However, issues of power dynamics and control of behaviour arise within the data where specific reference is made to the religious nature of the premises on which interventions are delivered and how that should moderate the conduct of those accessing:

*“You know we joke when people are swearing and kicking off, look you’re in a church, just remember. And it does actually still have a little bit of cultural relevance to that”.*

Community Chaplain / EFAI Coordinator - Participant 29

Arguably, despite the reference to light-heartedness, the recipient of support is entering into a contract based on the belief system of the donor that is at odds with the narrative that anyone will be supported regardless.

It is also important to acknowledge that the community surrounding the interventions delivered play a significant role in the creation of culture as much as the stakeholders managing them. Whilst the dialogue from stakeholders suggested equitable access, more traditional and less liberal viewpoints were visible within the data:

*“One of our guests who comes each week and she’s quite offended by somebody who comes. She’s apparently a lady of the night...who doesn’t come that fully dressed and how offended she is that person comes not fully dressed to a church and how that shouldn’t be the case.... I was like, I don’t think it matters, I think Jesus is absolutely fine with her coming as she is. She may need a blanket when she’s cold”.*

Community Chaplain / EFAI Coordinator - Participant 29

Subsequent themes in this research discuss the sustainability of interventions and the additional moral and ethical challenges that those delivering are faced with. The above quote indicates that there may be additional challenges managing conflicting norms and values between those of established congregations and ‘outsiders’ who may be perceived as deviating from what is collectively deemed acceptable. Similar experiences were related that also expressed how members of a community, and not those organising, may see the provision of food aid as an opportunity to proselytize:

*“What has been important from the start is (that) the \*\*\*\*\* is not a pond to fish from. This is not about evangelism. This is just about loving people, providing space, and food, and welcome...God will do his own thing... and I think people respond to that. Someone gave out some tracts from another church this week... And I just followed her around; took the tracts off the table and said we’re not doing that here. This is not what it’s about”.*

Vicar / EFAI Project Coordinator - Participant 28

It should be highlighted that the apparent ‘laissez-faire’ position on ‘God’s will’ was not a theme observed in every setting with a religious affiliation. Other responses could be interpreted as evangelical in nature:

*“They come here, they get a free cup of tea or coffee...you know they’re not charged for it, when there’s availability maybe some cakes or biscuits.... They get told, they come in, so much weight on their shoulders and then they’re happy...(We) See how they can come from that journey from the dark to the light”.*

Food Pantry Volunteer – Participant 57

Employing CDA, it can be suggested that the food provision in this context is framed within a broader narrative rooted in moral and religious ideology. The use of metaphor in CDA is treated as a powerful analytical tool because it reveals how meaning, power, and ideology are embodied within language but often in subtle or taken-for-granted ways. . The analogy of moving ‘from the dark to the light’, in particular, can be interpreted as moralistic and redemptive. Faith-based organisations have been acknowledged as having a special role to play, particularly in accessing sections of the community that may be particularly disenfranchised or mistrusting of state-led services, but this work may not always be broadly welcomed. The state also has a responsibility to ensure that services are universally available and provided free from prejudice or bias based on religious beliefs, or, more importantly their absence (Furness and Gilligan, 2012).

The preceding findings and discussion highlight how food insecurity and its alleviation extend beyond physical access and availability and consider how less tangible, embedded cultural, spatial, and relational dynamics influence how food is accessed, accepted, and experienced. This reflects social exclusion theories of poverty which are multi-causal, relational, and consider less tangible aspects such as the loss of status, power, self-esteem, and expectations. Where social exclusion theories are understood to mean something more complex than what is colloquially known as poverty and the absence of resources (Levitas, 2000), these findings also reflect theories proposed by Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman (2007) who state that fellow citizens may cause exclusion by morally rejecting people who are different.

To counter, these findings also suggest that whilst the religious nature of some food aid settings may pose barriers, food insecurity creates an urgency that often outweighs concerns about the setting itself. As observed by Salonen (2016), recipients frequently recognised the religious elements of provision but regarded them as peripheral to the primary purpose of accessing food; this is particularly the case when accessing support is a ‘last resort’ and something borne out of necessity rather than choice (Ranta et al., 2024).

In addition, the dominance of faith-based interventions in the provision of food aid should be viewed holistically; it is arguably a well-intentioned, pragmatic response to address shortfalls introduced by a rolling back of the welfare state. A caveat should be appended to these findings that accommodates the fact that this is a reaction to shortcomings of a system that is reliant upon civil society, rather than the individuals within it.

Whilst interventions have little efficacy at addressing the structural causes of food insecurity, findings suggest that they may serve alternative functions. A second aim of this subsection is to illustrate, drawing upon the data acquired with the fieldwork, how extended food aid interventions might replicate or reimagine particular facets of food literacy that might otherwise be diminished by food insecurity. The data suggests that, with the proviso that interventions are community-led and culturally aware, moments of dignity, inclusion, and authenticity are facilitated.

## **8.2 Extended food aid interventions as spaces of belonging**

By exploring how the social and cultural dimensions of food literacy are impacted by food insecurity and the ways in which extended food aid interventions attempt to respond, this section seeks to highlight how food projects can serve a restorative function.

In addition, the discussion seeks to explore prevalent tensions for whilst meaningful opportunities for engagement and exchange arise, these exist against a backdrop of wider social and economic exclusion. In doing so, this component aims to demonstrate how interventions are not in a position to address the structural cause of poverty but do play an important role in mitigating its isolating effects.

The findings presented in Chapter 7 endorse the notion that relational and culturally embedded practices also contribute (Cullen et al., 2015; Desjardin and Azervedo, 2013; Truman and Elliot, 2019). Through these practices, care is enacted, identity is affirmed,

and belonging is reinforced. However, in the presence of food insecurity, these rituals are compromised. The act of feeding others holds deep emotional and moral significance and reflects love, responsibility, and self-worth; food is an integral dimension of the relationship between caregiver and those being cared for (Lupton 1996). Mirroring those of Dowler and O'Connor (2012), these findings suggest that the inability to enact these behaviours, whether within the household or more widely, becomes, not only a form of exclusion, but a source of shame:

*“...and being a single father. I have my son every weekend. So my, my thing is. So long as my kids are eating. I don't care what happens to me...it's hard to get around the idea that I'm just not supporting the kids”.*

*Cookery class attendee - Participant 34*

Demonstrably, being in a position where food insecurity disrupts everyday forms of generosity and relational practice, creates additional emotional burdens for those experiencing it.

Across multiple stakeholder accounts, and alongside the provision of affordable food, the dissemination of functional and declarative knowledge is often positioned as the primary purpose of cookery interventions. Chapter 6 reflected upon how both the need for, and efficacy of, such interventions have been called into question. However, what also emerges from these findings is how impactful these spaces may be as social interventions that, to some extent, backfill the loss of opportunity to enact cultural rituals impeded by food insecurity. Whether intentional or incidental, this was a recurring theme. Whether food was being served as meals through communal dining experiences, distributed via social supermarkets or during participant led cooking sessions, the impacts extended beyond material support by facilitating connections within the community and supporting with assimilation and cultural exchange between individuals and the reduction of social isolation:

*“So, I think among some members there is a perception that it will be helpful for people to have cooking classes. But my understanding of it is that it's kind of focused towards people who want to take part in an activity. Like it's a social activity that people will enjoy as much as, if not more than being a way to share skills. Yeah, I think that's*

*definitely part of it, but I don't think it's viewed as a people don't know how to cook the food, they're getting thing”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 31

Certain groups are more likely to access extended food aid interventions, for example those whose immigration status denies access to public funds (Francis-Devine, 2025). Whilst practitioners might be critiqued for making assumptions about food preferences based on where a beneficiary is from, the findings expose a more complex dynamic. Where those who perceive themselves as outsiders may actively seek to fit in. For them, participating in the food rituals of those around them becomes a means of belonging:

*“If you’re a bit sensitive ...that sort of thing could put you off ... So, it’s always that I want it to look normal. And you do hear about children, their parents doing them lunch boxes with their food, which is linked to their culture, their heritage, and getting comments. So, they don’t want it. They want cheesy strings because they want to fit in”.*

Food Pantry Customer – Participant 21

Stakeholders would express frustration that uptake of services could be low, and this was attributed to how beneficiaries might perceive the offer. For example, managers of a community café expressed that they were perplexed by the fact that their offering of very low-priced tea and coffee did not appear to deter those accessing other food aid services from frequenting more costly, branded coffee shops within the local vicinity. Another stakeholder expressed that there was a need for outreach work if they were to reach the communities most in need:

*“That’s a difficult one to overcome. We’ve met youngsters in McDonalds and coffee shops because they didn’t want to come into the centre”.*

Young people's Centre Manager - Participant 22

These findings demonstrate that how services are valued interlinks directly with feelings of participating in the same social and cultural activities that form part of everyday life:

*“It is convenient, but it’s also from the films. How many films can you see where the people are all, oh, I’ll grab a coffee while I’m going somewhere. That’s normal. So why should you not just grab a coffee from Costa every morning”.*

Food Pantry Manager - Participant 51

There is evidently additional stigma associated with accessing services that might be perceived as ‘second-rate’ or where being seen might not project the kind of lifestyle that users would like to portray themselves as having to others. In addition, as with the critique of healthy-only food pantry models within Chapter 7, an underlying narrative reflective of the moral underclass discourse (Levitas, 2005), whereby the things that form part of everyday life should somehow be ‘off limits’ when experiencing poverty, is also evidenced:

*"There's a little bit of a divide. We don't want to charge people, but lunch club, you'd expect to be charged from what a lot of people spoke to. They said they would come to something less (if it was) free, like the lunch club. They'd rather pay. They would actually rather pay the money. And when I lived \*\*\*\* it is exactly the same. We were offering free tea and coffee and biscuits. No one ever came. But people want to pay for things, and they want to know it's good quality as well. Yeah, lunch club, you can sort that out for pay”.*

Food Pantry Manager - Participant 54

Demonstrably, whilst extended interventions are going some way to enable the replication of what may be considered everyday social interactions around food, challenges still exist. Arguably, interventions cannot replicate the exponential emotions that come with affiliation to certain lifestyle brands and retailers such as, for example, what being seen consuming that product says about the consumer. The symbolic aspects of brands and retailers form a means of communicating identity and group affiliation. The value of a product or service in this instance extends beyond functionality. Stead et al. (2011) found that, particularly for young people, food choices were used to construct a desired image, as a means of judging others, and as a mechanism for signaling conformity with peer groups.

Where extended services had been accessed, interpretation of the research data suggests that they offered effective mechanisms of cultural exchange and for expressing identity through food:

*“Some of our Iranian ladies, they really like cooking some of their home food, which they can't in a terrible place where they're living because there's not enough space. So, they love it when they can cook an Iranian meal for all of us. And we've all learned something from that. And, you know, we use a recipe for falafel. Now that's from one of them. You know, they're sort of traditional. So that's, you know, nice. They sort of had an impact on our food as well, which is really nice”.*

Community Café Volunteer – Participant 26

Where it has been acknowledged that many of those accessing food aid interventions are constrained by the living conditions to which they are exposed, they become marginalised. Drawing from critical discourse analysis the Iranian women here can be perceived as active agents with restored agency; the act of sharing their food has become a means of establishing their identity within a new culture. There is an intrinsic shift from constraint and marginalisation to one of active contribution.

In CDA, repetition of words within a phrase is treated as ‘meaning making’. There is evaluation occurring for the café volunteer as the statement is being made. However, the use of the word ‘nice’ is also potentially significant, approval is occurring but with a degree of trivialisation. A more emphatic word would imply proper ownership of what they are saying. To what extent, does the respondent believe there to be sustainable and tangible impact delivered?

Similar sentiments were expressed elsewhere that acknowledged the activity’s limited efficacy in addressing structural barriers causing food insecurity, but that they may support the mitigation of its effects:

*“...The intention of the cooking sessions is not to find a way to make cheap meals at home... (they) are about sharing your culture, get to know other people.... There is absolutely no assumption that this in any way solves somebody's food poverty situation”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 31

Whilst others recognised the power of the shared experience of cooking and eating together:

*A lot of it was just talking really...just chopping and talking...making things...having a bit of fun...breaking down barriers”.*

Community Chaplain / EFAI Coordinator - Participant 29

*“...and for some of our refugees, it’s learning English is a big part... and settling into society more. So, the benefits of food are never just food alone are they”.*

Community Café Manager – Participant 25

These findings indicate that when actively informed by beneficiary needs, extended food aid interventions offer meaningful social and cultural spaces for those who are often marginalised or find themselves socially excluded. Enabling beneficiaries to engage in the kind of everyday activities and rituals associated with ‘normal’ relationships with food supports feelings of inclusion. Experiencing food insecurity, in its broadest sense, equates to more than hunger and extends into a need for company (Housing Justice, 2025). The broader impacts of social eating are highlighted by Dunbar (2017) who states that those who frequently eat together are shown to feel happier more often, have greater life satisfaction, increased trust in others, have greater levels of community engagement, and dependable social networks.

As discussed, within Chapter 6, Food Literacy is frequently conceptualised as the ability to carry out tasks such as meal planning, budgeting, or understanding nutritional labels. Findings suggest that social connection and the relational act of sharing food must also be recognised as significant contributors to food culture. Responses expose a narrative suggesting that, for many, social isolation coexists with food insecurity.

Practitioners recognised the significance of food as a mechanism of support. Not just in terms of everyday provision but as a lever for bringing communities together or for drawing in those who may be trepidatious about accessing services.

*“It’s just getting over the threshold because of something. The fact there’s cake often does it... there’s a free cake inside”.*

Food Pantry Manager - Participant 54

Within CDA, symbols are understood as carriers of shared social meaning through which values, emotions, and norms are communicated and reproduced. In this context, cake extends beyond being food, although at a superficial level it offers relief, to becoming something more symbolic. Cake represents the intention to be welcoming, non-threatening, and relational. The use of the word cake symbolises comfort and care. In this, and several other instances across the data, the replication of ‘normal’ family life can be seen:

*“...the buzz after the Christmas dinner was just something we were all riding on – that was a bit of a lifeline to different people”.*

Food Project Director – Participant 17

*“I sat down and had two or three good half-hour conversations, \*\*\*\*\* whose son is in prison., just talking about how bad it is and what it’s like for her...where else (do) you get a chance to chat about that sort of stuff without any sense of judgement”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 12

*“Companionship makes people come and it’s because they can talk to somebody about other things or whatever their issues are”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 12

The data presented in this sub-section demonstrates how extended food aid interventions play a crucial role in mitigating the effects of food insecurity. They offer tangible support, such as affordable food, but also through the delivery of extended interventions, provide emotional support through the replication of familiar and comforting aspects of everyday life. Where social exclusion positions poverty not only as economic deprivation but also the erosion of social participation and belonging (Silver, 2007), these services can be interpreted as a means of counteraction. They achieve this by reestablishing community ties, rebuilding confidence, and fostering emotional connections.

### 8.3 Normalising food aid

The findings and discussion presented in this research have been drawn from the responses of stakeholders and beneficiaries involved in the commissioning, funding, operating, or accessing of what are being termed, within this research, extended food aid interventions. As highlighted, these interventions involve the provision of free or affordable food in ways that extend beyond a predefined food parcel; these include community cookery programmes, community cafés and shared meals, food pantries, and markets, as well as social supermarkets. Ziauddeen et al. (2025), refer to the latter as higher agency food interventions, an alternative to ‘traditional’ models where it is the intention that there are greater levels of autonomy over what produce is selected by beneficiaries. Chapter Five has already questioned the extent to which these decisions are truly autonomous, when the nature of supply is erratic and of questionable quality, and how that impacts the enactment of food literacy skills. However, other questions also persist: if food aid is being normalised, to what extent do adaptations to food aid models continue to promote the idea that food insecurity is an individual failing and not an impact of systemic inequalities?

It has been shown throughout the findings presented within this thesis that extended food aid interventions, at least in their current guise, have limited efficacy in addressing the structural causes of food insecurity. However, there is also a demonstrable and continued expansion, both in number of settings and geographic reach. Whilst controversial (Caraher and Davison, 2019), this could be indicative of a shift in function. What began as temporary, reactive measures to alleviate crisis appears to have evolved into a more permanent feature of the way in which many households, particularly those living in poverty, are expected to access food and other household essentials (Beck and Gwilym, 2023; Pickering and Wood, 2024). When the way in which food aid is accessed from interventions by ‘customers’ becomes part of strategic decision-making this proposition becomes even more viable. Arguably, failure to address systemic issues causing food insecurity can be interpreted as not recognising the system as failing.

Stakeholders were asked if they felt that food aid had become normalised:

*“Has it become part of our landscape that we've just become almost used to, or is there still that shame or that stigma element is something that's not going to go away? ..... I think one of the problems is that as a society, we've just accepted that people have to rely on food banks. But the way it's framed is a different one. So, is it becoming the norm? Yes. Food banks are everywhere now. They never used to be..... Is it normalised? I guess. Has the stigma gone? No”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 31

This quote reflects the complex and contradictory nature of evolved models of food aid. Utilising critical discourse analysis, the language here suggests a duality where acceptance and stigma co-exist.

The rhetorical questioning *‘has it become part of our landscape’* and *‘is it becoming the norm’* imply that the respondent believes that the public has become aware of the presence of food aid, and, at the same time, potentially desensitised to its presence. *‘We’ve just accepted’* implies that food aid is something that, as a society, we have become resigned to along with minimal questioning of the reasons behind its existence. However, the institutionalisation of food aid interventions, does not appear to coexist with the reduced challenges to dignity that the advocates of evolved models propose is the case. The overt and emphatic references to persistent stigma and shame within this stakeholder’s response underline this.

Other stakeholders referenced how, despite evolved iterations of delivery there was a broader societal narrative that certain groups shouldn’t be accessing services, whilst it might be expected of others:

*“If you think about the way it's reported in the media, it's always specific professions, teachers are having to resort to using a food bank, and they shouldn't have to...So that messaging, what that tells teachers, is you shouldn't be doing this...You shouldn't have to do this... It's not a message of “Did you need some support?” Did you get it? Brilliant. End of story. It is flagged as a sensationalised way of. But you shouldn't need one, surely. That's for, that's for people on benefits. That's for people who are sick. That's for other people”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 31

Here, the stakeholder expresses evident frustration at the way media narratives continue to frame accessing food aid as shameful, particularly when professionals require support. This is despite evidence, as discussed in Chapter 7, of an increasingly diverse demographic routinely experiencing financial precarity. Yet, the very media coverage being critiqued could also be read as an implicit condemnation of a system that has failed to prevent working professionals from needing such support.

Where othering is most visible, however, is the underlying assumption that food aid is somehow acceptable or expected for people on benefits, those who are sick, or, as explicitly stated, ‘other people’. This not only reinforces the stigma associated with access when needed but also reinforces notions that specific individuals or groups may somehow be less deserving of what may otherwise be understood as normal social rights (Baumberg et al., 2012, De Souza, 2019).

This section has questioned the extent to which there has been a desensitisation to the existence of food aid within the UK and how that could be interpreted as othering. In particular, where normalisation of interventions represents an acceptance of the inequalities that necessitate their existence, Section 7.4 explores how, despite efforts to maintain dignity, the issues of stigma and shame were still evident within the responses of those seeking the support of services.

#### **8.4 The persistence of stigma and shame**

The etymology of the word stigma, derived directly from the Greek, shows how it was originally used to refer to a mark, tattooing, scarring, or burning which identified to whom slaves or soldiers belonged. Latterly, the word has evolved from meaning a literal mark of identification to become powerfully symbolic of social disgrace and prejudice (Gray, 2017).

It has been consistently reported that, particularly in high-income countries, accessing food aid is highly stigmatised (Middleton et al., 2018; Pineu et al., 2021, cited in Taylor et

al., 2024). The psychological, social, and physical health impacts associated with a dependency upon food banks include negative emotions, embarrassment, shame, degradation, and powerlessness. Similarly, anxieties such as a fear of being judged by the public or service providers are associated. Taylor et al. (2024) suggest that these impacts may not necessarily be simultaneous, but are likely to be cumulative and, ultimately, create an increased emotional burden.

Stigma can generally be defined as either coming from the public or the self. The former occurs when large numbers of people within a society endorse negative stereotypes about the stigmatised population. Behaviours associated with public stigmatisation include, but are not limited to, prejudices such as anger and fear of the group, discrimination that is both obvious and more nuanced, such as being ignored, avoided, stared at, or patronised. Examples of this cited within this research have included how those accessing additional support are portrayed within the media.

Self-stigma, or internalised stigma, generally refers to the internalisation of public stigma by the individual with reduced self-esteem or self-efficacy as a result (Corrigan and Watson, 2002; Taylor et al., 2024).

With very few exceptions, the consensus amongst stakeholder respondents was that moving food aid models away from ‘handouts’ to ones that support individuals with the ability to both choose and pay, however nominal, was considered a means of increasing agency and reducing stigma. Although the extent to which this mitigated the personal toll and emotional effect is questionable, where, as discussed, that selection is having to be made from inconsistent quality, a lack of variety, produce that may fail to meet food authenticity needs and within contexts that introduce potential barriers to access.

One beneficiary, for example, related how at a particular setting they were treated poorly, spoken to abruptly by organisers, and that the experience was not worth the increased affordability offered there, particularly when the produce was often short-dated and therefore failed to represent realistic value for money. Another project would endeavour to replicate ‘normal’ shopping experiences, for example by ringing up the

‘retail value’ of produce on a till to emphasise the ‘saving’ that the customer was receiving. However, this could also be perceived as patronising, reinforcing the artificial set of circumstances in which transactions were being made, and how this was not a situation in which ‘everyone’ shopped.

Whilst increased dignity was often cited, the extent to which this was being achieved may have been potentially overstated. Stakeholder reflections indicate that this narrative may not always have been co-created, particularly where exchanges between stakeholders and beneficiaries appeared not to broach the subject:

*“One of our values as an organisation is dignity. And one of the things we talk about theoretically, as part of the rationale behind the social supermarkets, is that it affords people more dignity...People don’t tend to say, "It’s giving me more dignity." I don’t think that’s necessarily how people talk about their own experiences. Right?”*

Social Supermarket Operations - Participant 53

Here, using critical discourse analysis, the quote reveals a tension between the narratives expressed by stakeholders about how evolved models of delivery are addressing issues of stigmatisation. For example, the *‘rationale behind the social supermarkets’*, and *‘we talk about it theoretically’* both imply that this is a statement that aligns with *organisational* values. The use of the word *‘theoretically’* in particular indicates a potential lack of authenticity and ownership of the statement by the stakeholder making it. This is further reinforced by the *‘people don’t tend to say’* comment, which serves to underline how the narrative may be organisational, top down, and perhaps not as accommodating of the lived experiences of end users as first implied. Acting as visual field notes, Figures 25 – 28 show the exterior to several of the settings visited during fieldwork and are indicative of how the narrative that evolved models of food aid increase dignity is belied by the physical context in which the food is accessed. In particular, where the ‘standards’ that might be expected of ‘normal’ retail environments appear to be given lower priority.



Figure 26: A broken fridge outside the entry to a food pantry.



Figure 27: Bins and discarded packing crates outside the entry to a food pantry.



Figure 28: Closed shutters outside the entry to a food pantry.



Figure 29: Railings and a lack of signage for a food pantry may be intimidating to new users.

The question of how this particular evolution supported those accessing with feeling dignified was inadvertently addressed by stakeholders from a different extended food aid intervention operating locally. For clarity, as with other questioning within this research, this was a response not elicited through direct questioning and was information provided within the course of general conversation:

*“There’s a lot of talk, if I could be candid, about dignity, and it’s giving people dignity by this sort of shop, but if we’re honest, .... No, it’s slightly patronising, top-down when you’re doing it”.*

Vicar / EFAI Project Coordinator - Participant 28

Another stakeholder suggested that there was a contract between practitioners and beneficiaries that was implicit and served to delineate the relationships between donor and recipient:

*“...and again, we talked about gratitude and it’s kind of like, you know, well, I’ve given you a celeriac and well, thanks you know, and yet those sort of same attitudes, if you think back to the poor houses, terrible phrasing... where they were given bread, water, gruel, whatever bowl of whatever... People know that’s horrific. It’s exactly the same principle, just dressed up differently”.*

Utilising critical discourse analysis here, a top-down, paternalistic dynamic is revealed in which the donor assumes superiority. Here, the stakeholder, acknowledging the incongruous and unsuitable provision, is depicting a scenario in which the recipient is expected to show gratitude, nonetheless. The imagery of Dickensian workhouses is also significant; it represents the kind of philanthropic models of poverty relief in which recipients are disempowered, and stigma is propagated (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024).

Throughout the discussion of the findings presented within Chapters Six and Seven of this research, the presence of stigma, reduced dignity, and othering have been alluded to. However, stigma and the negative connotations associated with food aid were also more overtly referenced, indicating how it remained a concern for those accessing:

*“... and I just felt kind of embarrassed because I was coming here to get food from a food bank. But then I got used to it .... The ladies have been brilliant. They’ve never once judged me, even though it’s a church. I’m not very religious, but I’ve learned a lot”.*

Community Café Customer - Participant 4

This quote typifies the kind of internalised stigma (Corrigan and Watson, 2002; Taylor et al., 2024) where the acknowledged embarrassment of the respondent reflects the narrative that ‘resorting to’ food aid is a source of shame and signifies individual failing in some way. The sense of shame in this instance is not necessarily imposed externally but is clearly felt.

Firstly, it is notable that the beneficiary here refers to the project in question as a ‘food bank’. The model delivered in this context was a social supermarket and reflective of several sites visited as part of the fieldwork. As described within Chapter Four, the first phase of this research showed that terminology around food insecurity and food aid was not used consistently across the various strata of the research sample. What this quote shows is that stakeholders, such as commissioners and practitioners, may be ‘rebranding’ food projects to reflect the perceived improvements, but those accessing

continue to perceive them in the same way and use the language with which stigma and shame are associated. This suggests that the mechanism through which repurposed food is accessed has less impact on self-stigma than stakeholders propose.

This quote further endorses how specific spaces may present a barrier to access for some people, *'They've never once judged me, even though it's a church'* clearly reflects how this individual felt inhibited about seeking support. Either this hesitancy was because of not being part of an established congregation or, more pertinently, because they thought that they *would be* negatively judged if they were to access support.

However, what may be most significant within this statement is how the evident 'self-stigma', which was initially present, changed as the beneficiary became more familiar with the setting and the community within it. Whilst it could be interpreted that the self-stigma diminished, the phrase *'But then I got used to it'* implies more of a developed resilience to the stigma than any actual reduction of the stigma itself. The self-stigma associated with food aid is often ameliorated by individuals developing coping mechanisms to mitigate the negative effects of accessing food support. These strategies often involve the reframing of the experience to focus on positive aspects (Hardin-Fanning et al., 2025). In these instances, the associated stigma is not necessarily reduced; rather, it is habituated.

Findings from the data also expose how other practices, whilst arguably necessary within the context of extended food aid interventions, could be interpreted as challenging the narrative that dignity was being increased. On occasion, some of these practices would have unintentional positive benefits, but on the whole, required more of those accessing food aid than would be expected in general.

For instance, several practitioners would make references to the social interactions that occurred within the queues that would form outside interventions:

*“...and then we kind of reimagined what it might look like. And one of the things we noticed with the food hub, as it was, as a queue, people got to know each other and were chatting”.*

Community Chaplain / EFAI Coordinator - Participant 29

Whilst the increased number of social interactions in scenarios such as this are often perceived anecdotally as creating greater amounts of social value compared to food banks (Aitchison et al., 2024); Feeding Britain, 2024), this is demonstrably reduced when considering the less positive associations of food interventions. As discussed in Chapter Five, aspects such as the heightened anxieties and the sense of competition introduced when supply is exceeded by demand or the imperative to arrive early ‘before all the good stuff is gone’ are apparent.

As discussed within Chapter Six, responses within this research indicate that there is a broadening of the demographics that are frequenting extended food aid interventions. Increasingly, those in full-time employment and those who may have multiple drains on capacity, such as various jobs, family commitments, and caring responsibilities, have been shown to require support, which challenges the perception of what a food aid beneficiary ‘looks like’. However, there is an evident lack of regard for these contextual circumstances within several of the extended interventions visited as part of the fieldwork.

There is an inevitability within volunteer-led projects that hours of operation may be reduced and restricted to the times when volunteers are available. None of the projects visited as part of this research were operational outside of working hours, except one extended food aid intervention, which offered a ‘surplus market’ on a Saturday morning. The majority of projects were typically open for around two hours on one or two specified days of the week; these hours tended to be mid-morning to late afternoon. This is demonstrative of entirely necessary and pragmatic operational decision-making.

This, and other findings within the data, show practices in operation that challenge the narrative that extended food aid interventions are increasingly accessible for all. In

addition, several operational decisions could be reflective of unintentional othering and reinforcing the stigma associated with food aid.



*Figure 30: A number system in operation at a food intervention to control the number of customers accessing at any one time.*

Acting as a visual field note, Figure 30 shows a board with numbered key fobs that is reflective of systems at several food projects visited. Superficially, this may be considered to be a practical way of controlling the number of customers accessing at any one time. However, it is within this very act of controlling that the othering takes place. Firstly, public queuing systems have been shown to heighten internalised stigma because of the feelings of being on display that such systems induce (Brennan-Tovey et al., 2023). Secondly, where the act of waiting to be called reinforces power imbalances, the agency that was allegedly introduced with the ability to select produce is minimised

where the customer becomes beholden to another's authority (Hardin-Fannin et al., 2025).

In another instance, the mechanism for managing the logistical issue of controlling customers was also referenced. At this particular setting, this was not operated on a first-come, first-served basis but, instead, in a way akin to a lottery:

*“There’s a time slot for each one, all those times go into a bag, and they pull out a time that they can go to the pantry. That means they can either hang around and wait... chat with other people and play our games in the centre... or they can go and come back an hour and a half later”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 31

Using critical discourse analysis, this quote evidences several instances of othering and, to a certain extent, lack of respect for those accessing this service. At a superficial level these appear to be practical solutions to the operational challenges of managing restricted resources against a backdrop of increased demand. CDA assumes power to be embedded within ordinary language, especially when it is spoken by those who may perceive themselves to be ‘in control’.

Looking at what is being said superficially, rather than increasing the advocated agency that comes with choice-led models, it is demonstrably minimised by creating a circumstance where the decision over when the customer is ‘allowed’ to shop is left entirely to chance. What may be initially perceived as an attempt at creating fairness, arguably, reflects the dependence and powerlessness of the circumstance that necessitated the support being sought in the first place.

. It is the choice of language and phrases, such as, ‘*hanging around*’, ‘*playing our games*’, and ‘*come back an hour and a half later*’ that suggest that, in this instance at least, those seeking support have little else to be doing. Whilst no overt references are made, there is an inference regarding those referred to within this quote that their available time and capacity are because they have nothing ‘more important’ to be doing. Riches (2018)

refers to food aid as ‘wasted food for leftover people’, which, arguably, are sentiments reflected within this practitioner’s comment.

This sub-theme has responded directly to the central research question by highlighting how stigma and othering remain embedded within food aid interventions, and therefore impact upon the opportunity to practice food literacy. As support evolves to consider choice and agency, this research demonstrates how, despite efforts to ‘rebrand’, beneficiaries continue to experience inferiority and shame associated with accessing food aid. This is felt in practices, although potentially necessary, that reinforce control and reproduce power imbalances surrounding how food is provisioned.

However, this othering cannot be examined independently of the context in which interventions are delivered. Throughout the presentation of findings, it has been highlighted that increased demand and dwindling resources, the availability and capacity of volunteers, and logistical constraints combine to create tensions between operational efficiency and equitable access. In this sense, the othering and associated stigma that occurs could be considered to be the product of inadequate socio-economic conditions and not something consciously created by those involved in the delivery of extended food aid interventions.

An emergent area of research into food aid interventions explores how these tensions are felt not only by beneficiaries but also by those ‘tasked’ with delivering food support. How experiences of moral injury and moral outsourcing among practitioners are reflected within the findings of this research will be explored within the next sub-theme.

## **8.5 Moral injury within the delivery of extended food aid interventions**

Hunger trauma is a form of politically and economically driven trauma with associations of individuals feeling dehumanised and socially devalued. Hunger trauma carries with it feelings of shame, humiliation, and a deep sense of guilt (Alliance for Dignified Food Support, 2025; Walker et al., 2025), examples of which have been evidenced within the

findings and discussion of this research. However, this trauma isn't limited solely to those accessing food support but extends to those who work and volunteer.

The Independent Food Aid Network found that many who volunteer experience what is known as moral distress when witnessing the humiliation, shame, and hardship of beneficiaries (Walker et al., 2024). This co-exists with a sense of betrayal felt where political and economic systems fail the communities that they serve. Also known as moral injury (Dewar et al., 2023), front-line aid workers are potentially at greater susceptibility to situations at odds with their belief systems that impact upon deeply held ethics and values.

*“We can meet the demand. So far, we haven't had a problem in that, in that sense. But it's, it's, it's, it's, it's, it's just a, it's just a moral thing, I guess, or a mean thing. If I turn them away, then they, and they've got children that child might not eat”.*

Food Pantry Volunteer – Participant 44

This quote from a frontline practitioner is emblematic of the challenges facing those working within food aid settings. What begins as a confident statement regarding the ability of the organisation with *'we can meet the demand'* soon becomes destabilised when introducing the concept of how this aligns with individual moral beliefs.

Within critical discourse analysis, the repetition of words or significant moments of hesitation are recognised as moments of cognition, where the respondent is trying to work out what it is that they are trying to say (Machin and Mayr, 2023). Here the repetition of the word *'it's'* in conjunction with *'moral thing'* is reflective of the ethical dilemma being encountered. The stakeholder acknowledges the potential, yet significant, consequences of their decision making: *'that child might not eat'*.

As has been alluded to within the findings presented in this research, a sense of precarity is created within interventions where volunteers risk burnout because of moral injury and projects become potentially unsustainable:

*“... if you talk to citizens ..., if you talk to Mind, if you talk to \*\*\*\*\*, those support organisations, that's what's happening. It all comes down on the weight of the shoulders of their volunteers”.*

Regional EFAI Commissioner – Participant 43

Within the context of community food support, elements and contributing factors of moral injury manifest in several ways (Walker et al., 2025). These are: moral distress that occurs when a person that acts in a way that goes against their established ethical and moral response to a situation, systemic betrayal, being forced into a position where responsibility is taken for humiliation, trauma, and failure to meet the needs of others, managing desperation and moral conflict, inequality guilt, and absorbing trauma and emotional burnout.

Although not explicitly acknowledged in the data, thematic analysis indicates the presence of moral injury. Not all factors of moral injury were evidenced; those found and discussed below are systemic betrayal, absorbing trauma, being forced into a position where responsibility is taken for failure to meet needs and managing moral conflict.

### **8.5.1 Systemic betrayal**

Systemic betrayal arises when there is a betrayal of what is understood to be right by someone in a position of authority. It undermines the ability to trust whilst increasing the risk of despair, suicidality, and interpersonal harm (Shay, 2014). Whilst primarily associated with clinical professionals repeatedly exposed to trauma, Walker et al. (2024) propose that equivalent experiences and effects are becoming commonplace for those working closely with the lived realities of poverty and food insecurity where structural injustices are routinely witnessed and navigated.

This research has drawn upon feminist and emic-etic methods where the researcher positions themselves as friend and ally. This was achieved through the use of conversational techniques rather than more formal interviewing. Where research was conducted in person with practitioners, the data collection process would usually begin

with them providing a tour of their setting and showing how the intervention operated, etc. This process facilitated familiarisation and sharing of their motivations behind the setting up of the various projects.

Without exception, responses from the practitioners participating within this research showed that a moral imperative drove them to support others in need and to, as far as possible, address what could be interpreted as injustice. Some responses could be interpreted as reactive and in the moment:

*“I walked in and there was another volunteer consoling this girl.... So, I said, ‘what’s the matter, don’t panic, you know?’ and she was crying because she went to the food bank, and they turned her away... My blood boiled, and I turned to my son. I said, ‘We’re opening the food bank’ you know that’s what we’ve done”.*

Hyper local Food Project Leader - Participant 13

Whilst others were more considered and could be interpreted as vocational in nature:

*“The staff who work here (are) not money driven. They could obviously make a lot more money. They do it because they love the job... want to support young people”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 31

Findings presented and discussed within Chapter Five questioned whether the overarching food agenda of some interventions were misaligned with the needs of the communities they served. However, this is not to be confused with the moral imperative of practitioners to address what were perceived as systemic injustices:

*“It’s absolutely unsustainable on all levels. They might spout some half decent things every now and again, but nothing is properly funded, nothings properly costed, it comes from a place where they basically have no knowledge... no connection to it... and worse than that, clearly don’t care because the stories are out there”.*

Community Café Manager – Participant 25

Systemic betrayal, as a component of moral injury (French et al., 2021; Shay, 2021; Walker et al., 2025) is clearly evidenced within these statements; here, the individual(s) are let down by those in positions of higher authority. Walker et al. (2025) suggest that moral injury can manifest as anger, guilt, and shame on the part of those who have

stepped in to backfill the inadequacies of a failing system. The ‘injury’ occurs when the system’s failure becomes the individual’s moral failure if, having acknowledged the issue, they fail to act.

The discourse within this final quote is highly representative of this. The stakeholder is clearly expressing how they have little to no faith in the system that has created the failings they are stepping in to address. Phrases such as *‘they might spout’* depicts mistrust or apathy about broken promises which is further endorsed how an apparent lack of care and concern is shown by those in power. Similarly, the language here is emphatic; words such as *‘absolutely’* and *‘clearly’* epitomise the level of failure felt by the respondent.

Arguably, the effects of this systemic betrayal were in evidence during the fieldwork phase of this research, albeit at an organisational level. The coordinators of food networks within one city related how they were ‘stepping away from emergency food provision’. This particular organisation had been heavily involved in addressing emergency food needs across the city during the Covid 19 pandemic and had continued to support a variety of independent food aid projects subsequently. But, as they stated, it was ‘relentlessly downstream’.

Responses from other stakeholders also referenced similar levels of realisation:

*“they’re right at the bottom....we’ve got real disparity in society really....the people who are earning the most don’t realise how much they are earning compared to the people who are earning the least, and I think this is a society problem and we can never solve that”.*

Food Pantry Director - Participant 49

This quote clearly demonstrates a sense of resignation by the respondent to the structural inequalities leading to food insecurity. In this instance *‘the people who are earning the most’* is euphemistic for those in power; particularly where money may be interpreted as having control and influence. References to *‘not realising’* can be interpreted, at best, as being ignorant of the lived realities of those experiencing food

insecurity or those *'who are earning the least'*. However, drawing from critical discourse analysis which considers the context in which the discourse took place, there is inference here of *'those who are earning the most'* turning away, admonishing themselves of responsibility, which necessitates others to step in.

Whilst no overt reference is made here to burnout, within the phrase *'we can never solve that'* there is an implication of feelings of futility alongside a potential belief that it is those at a local community level that have been left to shoulder what is a societal issue.

Systemic betrayal, within the context of moral injury (Shay, 2014; Walker et al., 2024), refers to a breakdown in trust and when leadership fails to uphold the values of fairness and social justice that are expected of it. The emotional and ethical burden, reflective of that felt by many of the practitioners interviewed, is revealed here alongside a sense of fatalism and resignation. The implication here is that maintaining the level of effort required to address failing systems as well as possible may be unsustainable in the longer term.

### **8.5.2 Absorbing trauma**

The extended food aid interventions participating in this research varied in size and scope as well as the extent to which they might be interpreted as *'professional'* or scaffolded upon a moral imperative and being driven by an emotional response to address inequalities. For example, some settings had ties with local authorities and public health teams, others had brokered relationships with local citizen advice bureaux to enable the signposting of wider support for beneficiaries beyond food. Other interventions were more independent, being run by small teams at a hyper-local level with few resources to support the additional emotional burden that accompanies experiences of food insecurity.

Vicarious trauma, also known as secondary traumatic stress, is a condition that occurs within individuals who experience emotional and psychological distress as a result of indirectly witnessing or learning about the traumatic experiences of others (Mind, 2025).

It is, in essence, a form of secondary traumatising involving transmission through empathetic engagement with those who have survived or are experiencing traumatic events. Previous research indicates that those volunteering in food support are experiencing forms of vicarious traumatising where, because of their moral imperative, they are placed in circumstances requiring the absorption of others' experiences (Hanson and Porter, 2025; Walker et al., 2025).

Findings within this research show that practitioners and volunteers are routinely experiencing and dealing with issues beyond the provision of food. These issues may manifest in the form of behaviours exhibited whilst interventions are operational. More commonly, they are exposed to, and required to accommodate, complex and often distressing beneficiary narratives. Several practitioners would relate how a significant proportion of their work was supporting potential beneficiaries with overcoming the emotional distress of accessing food aid for the first time.

In one setting, a former mining town, a high proportion of men were unemployed and requiring support. Here, the volunteer related how most of their work was 'done in the car park before they even step over the threshold':

*"...they're very hesitant in coming in... he was very embarrassed, single guy, ...he's out there... but he had a drug problem. We were talking with him. Next thing we knew he turned up at the door and he'd brought all his drug paraphernalia with him and just gave it to us and ran out the door".*

Food Pantry Manager & Counsellor - Participant 55

The poor mental health of beneficiaries was frequently cited as challenging for volunteers:

*"Lots of anxiety, which is quite crippling, getting out to places, interacting with people, and then that ranges to very severe mental health and delusions and personality disorders as well. Mental health the biggest factor. And then with that lack of access to*

*support and healthcare, a lot of medical disabilities as well which are a bit chicken and egg at times”.*

Food Project Director – Participant 40

The application of CDA to the choice of language used exposes a level of vicarious trauma. For example, the phrase *‘which is quite crippling’* mirrors the language and emotional state of the person to whom they are referring; it could be understood that this respondent is no longer being empathetic and has begun to take on the trauma of the person they are talking about (Gard, 2020). In addition, considering moral injury, the reference to *‘access to support’* and *‘a bit chicken and egg’* reflects both frustration at the inadequacies and lack of suitable support systems, but also inferred helplessness at how to manage the situation that has been laid at their doorstep.

Similar accounts endorse the findings that volunteers and practitioners are being exposed to high levels of trauma and challenging situations within the course of their work:

*“a gentlemen come in over the last year who physically tried suicide .... We got him into a mental Institute. They had a week in that hospital. They had one follow up appointment, and there's no other follow up appointment at all. Nothing. You just think there's a team around them dealing with it, but unless they constantly show illness and be vulnerable, they're not going to get any support. So, they're back with us”.*

Cookery Class Leader - Participant 56

*“To be honest, it's been like a pendulum. ... then it's all about the mental health. So, it's hard to explain because I think what happens is they come in for food, we give them the six hampers...then something comes out, like their financial problems or their life problems, marriage problems, difficult problems. And then it comes into the well-being. Yep. So, the one has led into the other more than, I suppose”.*

Food Pantry Manager - Participant 54

Arguably, this quote from a practitioner exemplifies the emotional burden that is being carried by those operating food interventions. Opening with *‘to be honest’* implies an unburdening, akin to a confessional; this respondent is demonstrably getting something off their chest. This is emphasised with the *‘yep’* within the context of an emotionally laden response. When spoken aloud, the seemingly insignificant word acts as a moment

of resignation and reflection. Secondly, *'it's been like a pendulum'* shows how vicarious trauma is experienced; not necessarily all at once and in equal measure but cumulatively and erratically (Walker et al., 2025).

The findings and discussion above could be critiqued as interpreting stakeholder accounts as vicarious trauma rather than an analysis of direct statements made. However, it is of note that there was an instance during the period of this research that demonstrates the additional emotional capacity required of those running extended food aid interventions.

During a follow-up visit to an intervention, six months after the initial meeting, it became evident that one of the co-founders had stepped down from their role:

*"Because there have been times this last year, I don't know if you notice, that \*\*\*\*\*, who you interviewed, she's not with us anymore, so she left to go off... didn't come back, checked up on her. Yeah, yeah. Okay".*

Food Project Director – Participant 17

The words *'there have been times this last year'* infer challenges to be overcome that, within the context of this conversation, were unanticipated; significantly, the reference to a year also implies that these challenges were consistent and, potentially, unrelenting. It was intimated within this conversation that the co-founder's departure was attributable to her not being able to accommodate and cope with these additional challenges. This is further endorsed where the respondent *'checked up on her'*.

Drawing from deduced findings within the research data, this subsection has explored how there is an emotional and psychological toll experienced by practitioners and volunteers delivering extended food aid interventions. This section has contributed to the research question in two ways. Firstly, by highlighting how food insecurity is part of broader structural inequalities and relative poverty (Odoms-Young, 2018; Francis-Devine et al., 2025). Food insecurity co-exists with other experiences and impacts of poverty, as evidenced by those working on the frontline who are consistently confronted by complex

and overlapping trauma, including poor mental health, substance abuse, financial issues and emotional distress.

Secondly, where this research explores food insecurity and food literacy within the context of extended food aid interventions, these findings highlight additional complexities introduced beyond the redistribution of food. This also highlights a critical consideration for policy narratives that advocate the devolution of many services to civil society. Adequate support networks and safeguarding measures need to be in place if there is to be an avoidance of harm and trauma being reproduced within those at the frontline of delivering interventions. This is particularly the case for interventions that are driven by moral imperatives to address need, such as those run by volunteers in reaction to crisis. These settings in particular frequently lack the formal training, resources, and mental health support that may be available within more ‘professionalised’ operations.

### **8.5.3 The moral conflict of failure to meet needs**

Existing research (Walker et al., 2025) states that components of moral injury include both being forced into a position where responsibility is taken for failure to meet needs and managing moral conflict. However, based on the findings drawn from this research, it is proposed that, where a moral imperative primarily drives practitioners and volunteers, a failure to meet needs becomes an ethical conflict in itself and, as such, findings regarding these areas will be presented together.

The findings and discussion within Chapter Five proposed that with experiences of food insecurity come heightened anxieties around accessing food, and that additional steps were often required to achieve a parity of health outcomes. Examples included navigating inadequate public transport systems, an overreliance upon higher priced retailers with, primarily, unhealthy foods, or having to visit multiple retailers to provision what was necessary within inelastic household budgets. It was also highlighted how the process of accessing food from extended food aid interventions introduced stressors such as worrying that ‘*all the good stuff will be gone if I don’t get there early*’. It has been

shown that these tensions for beneficiaries are primarily attributable to inconsistent, erratic, and occasionally inappropriate supply.

A contributor to moral injury is where the individual(s) may find themselves forced into a position where they take responsibility for failure to meet needs (Walker et al., 2025). Section 7.3 of this chapter has shown that there is a persistence of stigma and shame associated with extended food aid interventions. This is despite efforts to increase agency through modified 'retail' models. This, in itself, could be perceived as contributing to a failure to meet the fundamental human right of being able to acquire an adequacy of appropriate food with dignity (United Nations, 2025 )

However, more directly linked, there is a recurrent, emergent theme within the data surrounding the issue of how practitioners both manage the equitable distribution of resources and the potential impact that may have on beneficiaries and volunteers.

As discussed, the majority of interventions researched were scaffolded upon a moral imperative to address food insecurity. A fundamental need had been recognised, and efforts were being made to address this. Against a backdrop of insufficient supply and increasing demand, some form of regulation was required; this was particularly the case in social supermarkets and food pantries. There was what could be perceived as an ironic circumstance where interventions were striving to increase accessibility for all who needed it, whilst simultaneously being required to be restrictive. In most instances, it was those most in need that practitioners felt should have priority access, rather than operating on a 'first come, first served' basis.

'Traditional' food bank models operate on a referral basis; beneficiaries tend to be signposted to support by a third party such as a family worker, school, GP, or other similar profession. In these instances, those seeking support are issued with a voucher which provides evidence of the legitimacy of need to the food intervention (Trussell.org.uk, 2025).

However, where no referral was required to access these EFAls, questioning the legitimacy of those accessing became a moral dilemma for volunteers:

*“So, they obviously think that some people who take it, shouldn’t be taking it ...and some of our donors aren’t massively happy that we would carry on supporting people”.*

Food Pantry Director - Participant 50

In general, the comments made by stakeholders reflected opinions that somehow a proportion of those accessing, despite paying the required amounts for produce as stipulated by the organisers of each intervention, did not have a legitimate reason to be accessing services or were somehow taking produce away from others who may be more deserving:

*“When we first started, we had a lot more people like that. But because my partner in crime is semi-vociferous and she will make comments... she’ll be speaking in a general manner but will make her point ...then they might not come back”.*

Food Pantry Volunteer – Participant 44

*We’ve had some kickback; we’ve had people who don’t like it because they’re not getting stuff for free anymore...We’ve made a change recently by bringing in the tokens and increasing the price slightly... So of course, they’re going to be unhappy...They’ve been caught out”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 31

Similarly, there were intimations made by practitioners, despite recognition that the supply from their intervention may be insufficient to meet needs, that it was ‘against the rules’ to be utilising multiple food interventions in order to acquire adequacy of supply :

*“.... we know it's happening because people will commute, you know, amongst themselves, say, well, I went to this place, they're open on a Wednesday...but they say really quietly, as if we don't know that it's happening”.*

Social Supermarket Operations - Participant 53

Unspoken rules within food aid, such as evidenced here by the expectation that service users should not be accessing multiple interventions, operate as tacit norms that are internal to one group but may be more opaque to another ( Lamont, 1992 cited in Foster et al., 2023). Demonstrably, there are perceived boundaries that are assumed as understood by the stakeholders that are either not comprehended or are perceived as being ignored by beneficiaries. This becomes problematic for two reasons: firstly, this reinforces othering where one group is seen as not conforming to the assumed behavioural ideals of another. In this instance, where the dominant group has control of the resources and is expecting certain behaviours in return this could be even more problematic.

Secondly, this introduces a moral dilemma for those controlling the distribution of food: how to manage those who are perceived to be transgressing from expected behaviours in some way. In addition, as will be discussed, contributing to potential tensions between the various actors in accessing food aid.

Similar tensions were reflected elsewhere, although with more overt ‘rule breaking’ and associated consequences:

*“You know we’ve had the scammers in like... how many children? You have three children... and somebody else says ‘she ain’t got no kids’... So, we do catch them, just ban them”.*

Hyper local Food Project Leader - Participant 13

Demonstrably, the challenges of managing an increasing need had created a scenario for some practitioners that they should be undertaking additional checks or verification that those accessing had genuine entitlement:

*“Our responsibility, as best as we possibly can, (is) to give that food to people who really need it. And that's what we do. We got our methods, you know, to find out, you know, social media—Facebook's fantastic”.*

Hyper local Food Project Leader - Participant 13

Drawing from discourse analysis, where this response was made in an area of considerable deprivation, it can be construed that the stakeholder has assumed a role where they appear to have been let down by others. *'Our responsibility'* suggests that this is a mantle that has been passed on where others have failed or walked away. There are further questions to be asked regarding how far the responsibilities of that role reach. *'We got our methods'* for example, implies a possible overstepping with regards to how this stakeholder balances who does and who doesn't access their services. Here, what begins as assumed authority in reaction to a perceived injustice risks becoming something unregulated and ethically questionable.

Nonetheless, responses across the dataset reveal that practitioners are being placed in positions that require them to make decisions over who does and who doesn't 'deserve' to be using extended food aid services. As exemplified within the following quote, this creates considerable sources of tension:

*"And then you get some people that come that I want to punch in the face because they tell me they're then going to take the dog to the poodle parlour and then they're going to the gym. And I'm like, well, what are you doing here? But I can't turn them away because she's got a son whose special needs and she's this carer and she's telling me that in one breath and then the other breath saying that. And I'm like, you know, it frustrates me. I can't turn away because some might not eat if I do".*

Food Pantry Volunteer – Participant 44

This subsection has discussed how those delivering food aid are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, moral injury from consistently being exposed to the effects of systemic inequalities and poverty. In particular, how hunger trauma might be felt vicariously and how challenging decisions are having to be made and enforced that are necessitated by moral imperatives that are, arguably, reactions to failings of those in power.

An emergent finding, following reflexive thematic analysis of the data acquired for this research, is that volunteers and practitioners may also be experiencing trauma themselves within the process of stepping in to address what they perceive to be injustice.

Findings and discussion have alluded to the tensions that can manifest within what are potentially highly emotive exchanges. Whilst not witnessed within the course of carrying out this research, the following quotes indicate that volunteers are having to negotiate more than how to distribute food equitably:

*“My main concern is the staff, I mean they shouldn’t have to put up with being abusive... they shouldn’t have to put up with somebody else’s aggression”.*

Food Pantry Manager – Participant 32

*“there’s an enormous toll on the staff, but they are very skilled, and they’ve been doing well”.*

EFAI Manager - Participant 31

*“...and we have some members of our team who are a bit concerned that other people can be frightening”.*

Food Pantry Manager – Participant 32

This finding presents an area of potential further research to ascertain the extent to which these remarks reflect the experiences of volunteers working within the delivery of food aid interventions more broadly.

It has also been shown how the delivery of extended food aid interventions generates emotional and psychological strain, exposing practitioners and volunteers to varying degrees of moral injury (Dewar et al., 2023). Stakeholder testimony and thematic analysis provide emergent findings that show how moral injury emerges not only from witnessing and absorbing the trauma and hardship faced by beneficiaries but also from being forced to navigate ethical dilemmas, inconsistent systems, and potentially unrealistic expectations. The forms of moral injury identified within this research includes systemic betrayal, absorbing trauma, and moral conflict in failing to meet needs. An additional emergent finding suggests that volunteers may also be exposed to a form of trauma themselves, introduced where navigating the challenges and constraints of an overburdened charitable response creates emotionally charged interactions between practitioners and beneficiaries.

Within the context of this research which seeks to explore the influence that extended food aid interventions have upon the relationship between food insecurity and food literacy, moral injury, and its associated effects, underscores how a dependency on civil society is potentially problematic. The important role that food aid plays in responding to food insecurity is acknowledged by Furey (2025) who describes it as a commendable intervention. However, they are also clear that the primary responsibility for ensuring reliable access to adequate food lies with the public sector. This is a view reinforced by Riches (2018), who argues that food aid represents a legitimate and morally compelling community response, and is an act of practical compassion deeply embedded within the social fabric, but it's not a substitute for state accountability.

However, the dependence of the state upon community-based support shows little sign of diminishing. The civil society covenant further reinforces the idea that the voluntary sector is best placed to take on roles that arguably should sit with the state. This is evident within recent government rhetoric, *“so we are turning the page on what has come before and beginning a new chapter in the relationship between government and civil society. One that recognises all that they do for us- at home and abroad- and aims to realise the enormous potential that exists in organisations like our charities and community groups. A partnership that restores the place of civil society back at the centre of our national life”* (GOV.UK, 2024).

Viewed through a critical discourse lens, language such as *‘turning the page’* and *‘a new chapter’* positions the relationship between government and civil society as progressive and transformational, seeking to reframe this relationship as a partnership. Yet the language is also ambiguous and lacks clarity about what this partnership actually entails, particularly in terms of resources, funding, and accountability. Where it gestures towards ideas of co-governance, it also aligns closely with austerity era practices that have seen the state withdrawal from social protection whilst increasingly expecting under-resourced charities and community organisations to pick up the slack (Barford and Gray, 2022; Pandya-Wood, 2025).

This raises significant concerns around what Riches (2018) describes as ‘uncritical solidarity’. These well-intentioned acts, founded on the moral imperatives of groups and individuals to address perceived injustices, not only risk obscuring the systemic and structural causes of poverty but also the sustainability of the very interventions themselves. Food insecurity does not occur within a vacuum, but it coexists with other symptoms of poverty, including, as evidenced within this data, ongoing mental health challenges, drug and alcohol abuse, financial challenges, and suicidal ideation. Volunteers are potentially unprepared for and unsupported in dealing with such issues.

## **8.6 Summary of findings**

The findings presented within this chapter have examined how food insecurity intersects with food literacy within the context of extended food aid interventions. The discussion has been set within broader debates about access, inclusion, dignity, and stigma. These debates question the suitability and, potentially more critically, the sustainability of interventions in their current guise.

Through the process of reflexive thematic analysis, it has been shown that spaces from which food aid is delivered are far from neutral; rather, they are shaped by cultural norms, organisational affiliations, and the perceptions of the community around them, which can both facilitate or hinder beneficiary engagement. Spaces not only influence who accesses support but also how that support is experienced. The proposition that food insecurity cannot be separated from the social context in which it occurs is further reinforced.

Findings further illustrate how interventions may act as spaces of belonging and restore cultural components of food literacy that are diminished by food insecurity. Whilst unable to address the structural causes of food insecurity, these interventions can replicate the relational dimensions of food literacy. Exchanges through shared meals and cookery lessons have been shown to foster social ties, enable cultural exchange, and support assimilation and integration into new environments.

Focusing more specifically on the evolution of food aid interventions, the discussion has highlighted a tension regarding the persistence of associated stigma. Whilst initiatives such as social supermarkets and higher agency models aim to enhance dignity, entrenched narratives that frame food insecurity as personal failure continue to co-exist. In addition, the normalisation of food aid as a permanent feature within the provision of welfare generally risks masking the systemic inequalities that necessitate its existence.

Finally, drawing on critical discourse analysis, the discussion has explored the emerging concept of moral injury within the provision of food aid. Practitioners have been shown to be navigating complex moral dilemmas alongside experiencing both vicarious trauma and direct challenges to their own wellbeing.

Taken together, these findings are grounded in the experiences and interpretations of participants included within this study and, as such, are shaped by the contexts in which the research was undertaken. Where the findings presented in this chapter are particularly informed by an interpretative approach that draws on CDA, the discussion attends not only to observable practice but also to less tangible dimensions such as meaning, experience, and effect. As such these findings offer an insight rather than a generalisable account of EFAls more broadly.

## **Chapter 9 – Conclusions**

### **9.1 Introduction to chapter**

This research has explored the intersections between food insecurity and food literacy, using evidence gathered from stakeholders and beneficiaries of extended food aid interventions in the United Kingdom. Two central questions have guided the study: Firstly, how does the incidence of food insecurity impact food literacy in the UK? Secondly, how do extended food aid interventions support food literacy in the context of food insecurity, and what might the associated challenges be? These questions were examined through the theoretical lenses of poverty, social exclusion, and othering.

### **9.2 Summary of Key Findings**

The social constructivist ontology of this research minimises the requirement for triangulation of data for findings to be considered valid. However, as outlined within the methodology, a purposive geographical spread and the collection of demographic data was included in anticipation of potential exploration of shared patterns or points of divergence. No significance was found relating to region, other than potential access to public transport as discussed. Similarly, analysis of the data did not reveal anything of significance relating to other demographic characteristics of research participants.

Chapters 6 and 7 presented and discussed findings that, following analysis, were organised into themes of intrinsic, heuristic, and extrinsic factors of food literacy. Chapter 8 presented and discussed findings relating to extended food aid interventions. A summary of the key findings relating to each of these chapters is presented below.

#### **9.2.1 Interlinkages between food insecurity and food literacy**

This research was initiated in response to statements suggesting that enhancing cookery skills could reduce the need for food aid. Findings from a systematic review of existing literature (Appendix D) examining the efficacy of cookery interventions targeting

adults indicated inconclusiveness. This was found to be for several reasons: high levels of attrition amongst course attendees, increased awareness was not shown to translate into behavioural changes, there was a lack of consistency of measures across identified studies, which made comparison challenging, and significantly, there was a lack of post-intervention follow-up. In addition, it was noted that many attendees of the interventions self-selected and had pre-existing interests or abilities in cooking.

For the purposes of this research, cookery is to be understood as synonymous with the most cited definition of Food Literacy (Vidgen and Gallegos, 2014). The findings of this research indicate that narratives suggesting potential deficits in intrinsic factors of food literacy to be overstated. Where it has been suggested, albeit simplistically, that the skills among those requiring food aid are lacking, it can be concluded that the reality is more nuanced. This questions both the necessity of skills-based interventions and the validity of their endorsement by proponents.

Functional knowledge encompasses the ability to plan, manage, select, and prepare foods, whilst declarative knowledge can be understood as knowing what impact dietary choices have on individual wellbeing. Participants in this research demonstrated a pre-existence of functional knowledge on the whole, which concurs with other identified literature (Garcia et al., 2016; Reicks et al., 2014; Wrieden et al., 2007). However, a caveat is appended where this research also found that attendees of specific cookery interventions tended towards having a pre-existing level of ability or interest. A challenge for interventions exists in creating behaviour change in participants who may derive exponential benefits but who are also unlikely to self-select into attending the intervention.

Nonetheless, a key finding of this research suggests that the impediments introduced by structural barriers are often misinterpreted as a skills deficit. Within the context of food insecurity, any pre-existing abilities are constrained by restricted opportunities. Therefore, this research suggests that it is necessary to separate *having* the knowledge from *the application* of knowledge.

Narratives proposing individual skills deficits may also be driven by the idealism of what constitutes cookery. Frictions exist regarding the applicability of cookery as a proposed solution, as it often fails to consider specific circumstances. In general, those participating stakeholders promoting cookery mean it to be ‘from scratch’, and the accommodation of additional physical and structural barriers introduced by experiences of poverty is often neglected. It has been shown that decisions such as the use of convenience foods and to an extent, equipment like the microwave, whilst demonstrably pragmatic, are stigmatised as ‘lazy’ options.

Where the act of food preparation extends beyond simply satisfying hunger, tensions arise regarding the appropriateness and applicability of various food agendas. Interventions championed by those with motivations beyond skills dissemination, for example, promoting plant-based diets or addressing environmental concerns, are shown to be perceived as elitist, unwanted, and reflective of provider priorities rather than being in the interest of the beneficiary.

Whilst the efficacy, applicability, and necessity of interventions supporting skills have been questioned, it has been shown that there may be increased justification for education around the constituents of a healthy diet. This research has evidenced that Public Health messaging is understood, but only to an extent. This was shown to be problematic and hegemonic when practitioners promote idealised behaviours to the exclusion of practices, such as the use of frozen or tinned produce, which may be necessitated within the context of food insecurity, particularly when such adaptations are within the principles of healthy eating. Significantly, the data also evidenced self-stigmatisation, where responses show that choices incorrectly perceived as unhealthy elicit feelings of guilt or inadequacy. On this basis, the imperative for food literacy interventions is necessary, but the current focus is misaligned. There is more to be done at a population level that addresses the realities of how declarative knowledge is applied in a variety of contexts, including, but not limited to, those where food insecurity is prevalent.

An aim of this research has been to explore the interconnections between food insecurity and food literacy and to examine how these interlinkages are shaped by, and respond to, broader social, cultural, and structural forces and influences. It is beyond the intrinsic factors of food literacy, where the impacts of food insecurity are potentially most visible.

This research makes a key contribution by repositioning heuristic factors. These are the practical, adaptive strategies required to navigate food insecurity and are proposed within this research as distinct and separate from functional and declarative knowledge.

Heuristics have been shown to encompass more than just managing limited household finances; they extend to the application of knowledge such as sourcing, managing, and adapting resources within constrained conditions. However, these adaptive behaviours are frequently also hindered by barriers that restrict their implementation. The inconsistent and occasionally inappropriate supply, in conjunction with broader socio-economic challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and socio-economic conditions, combine to exemplify how increased effort is required to achieve parity in health outcomes.

This research also finds that heuristics are shaped by the psychological burdens associated with food insecurity, which, in turn, influences the application of knowledge. Food Insecurity is one of several symptoms of poverty. Drawing on scarcity theory, it has been shown that what may be perceived as irrational spending or decision-making is often the result of additional stress and overburdened cognitive capacity. These behaviours are frequently misinterpreted by stakeholders as irresponsibility, when in fact they are symptomatic of living within constant constraint.

The findings relating to financial literacy, as a component part of heuristics, complicate deficit based assumptions that are embedded within narratives around the causes and solutions to food insecurity. Participants frequently demonstrated high levels of financial awareness, budgeting skills and strategic decision making. However, as with the intrinsic factors of food literacy, these competencies are not shown to have particular protective

properties in the presence of extreme constraint. Particularly where there are non-negotiable shortfalls in household budgets, trade-offs are unavoidable and even 'good' decisions represent compromise

This research has provided a novel framework through which the impact of food insecurity on food literacy can be understood (Figure 12). Heuristics and the application of knowledge are shown to be a bridge between intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Where food is secure, there is bi-directional travel between 'layers'. However, with the introduction of food insecurity, this travel becomes impeded. It has been shown how extrinsic factors, such as culture, education, and participation within food systems, are disproportionately impacted within contexts of food insecurity.

These disruptions introduced by food insecurity are concerned with more than inadequate quantities of food. The ability to participate in cultural practices and shared experiences is also impacted. Here, food, or the absence of it, becomes a symbol of social exclusion. The inability to provide and fulfil traditional caregiving roles creates situations of shame and self-stigmatisation. Food has been shown to hold symbolic, emotional, and cultural significance that is used to care, to connect, and to express identity. However, in a context shaped by food insecurity, these practices are constrained. Where participation is denied or becomes inaccessible, normality, dignity, and belonging are at risk. These findings illustrate how the inability to engage in everyday food rituals, such as preparing culturally significant meals, celebrating events, or simply feeding others, can generate a sense of exclusion that mirrors broader experiences of marginalisation.

A key finding is in the imperative for the development of evolved models of food literacy, and for those promoting it, to include the capacity to engage and participate in 'everyday life'. Where current dominant models and definitions foreground physical health as the optimum, the uptake of foods that may be considered unnecessary or frivolous may be disregarded. However, this research finds, as evidenced by the importance placed on treats and treating, that in environments constrained by poverty, these foods may hold heightened symbolic importance. Similarly, denying access to them represents a form of

othering where the agency and choice afforded under 'normal' circumstances are removed.

Adequately addressing the food authenticity requirements of those accessing support necessitates specific adherence to rituals and customs, and the question of who bears this responsibility has been raised. However, this research indicates that food heritage needs are less fixed. Where perceptions of food requirements become preoccupied with characteristics such as race or country of origin, the potential to inhibit interaction and assimilation into new surroundings or respond to social pressures becomes heightened. A key finding shows that there is a need for reflexivity in assessing the cultural needs of beneficiaries; failure to do so can be interpreted as othering based on misplaced, preconceived notions of what 'people' eat. In this instance, adaptation does not equate to a loss of cultural identity but instead highlights how food heritage is constantly negotiated and redefined.

The findings from this research have highlighted the complex interplay between food literacy and food insecurity and have also challenged the dominant narratives that frame a potential lack of food literacy as an individual failing. It has been shown how structural inequalities influence the opportunity to implement literacy skills, but these structural inequalities also impact their acquisition through 'formal' education channels. School based education was found to be both inaccessible and, at times, inappropriate. Responses within the data reveal a disconnect between curricula and lived realities, which serves to reinforce cycles of exclusion.

However, despite systemic barriers, functional food literacy is often acquired out of necessity. Adaptive practices reflect a form of resilience, although this in itself is problematised within the context of neoliberal education frameworks, and again, risks obscuring structural inequalities. When applying a lens of social exclusion, the restriction of educational opportunities emerges as a form of marginalisation. Furthermore, where curricula align with supporting economic outputs rather than supporting skills applicable within everyday contexts, this can be interpreted as privileging middle-class norms and thereby exacerbating existing inequalities.

This research has revealed an evident tension between the aspirations of food systems thinking and the lived experience of those experiencing food insecurity. For example, whilst the benefits of interventions promoting positive environmental outcomes were appreciated and acknowledged, the ability to engage and do so meaningfully was shown to be impacted. The prioritisation of affordability and volume was necessitated. It was also demonstrated that the efficacy of environmental directives requiring individual behaviour change were viewed with scepticism when viewed within the context of global trends.

Importantly, these findings do not suggest there to be a wholesale rejection of systems thinking and the associated benefits, but instead they highlight the limited agency with which to enact appropriate behaviours. This limitation, in conjunction with a sense of futility introduced, may contribute to feelings of exclusion, and serve to reinforce socio-economic divisions.

### **9.2.2 Extended food aid interventions**

A social constructivist ontology was adopted for this research, providing a philosophical stance that frames reality as subjective, multiple, and socially constructed. Where this study examined the complex and context-dependent phenomena of food insecurity and food literacy, this approach has been particularly relevant. Firstly, the social constructivist perspective rejects positivism and the idea of a single objective truth; secondly, it facilitates the co-creation of knowledge between researcher and participant.

When responding to the second research question that explore how UK extended food aid interventions support food literacy in the context of food insecurity and what the associated challenges are, this ontology was pertinent. The exploration of diverse, context-specific experiences was enabled. Thematic analysis was conducted reflexively with codes and themes constructed in response to the data rather than imposed a priori. This approach legitimises the presentation of emergent results as valid and meaningful,

particularly where tensions, contradictions, and unintended consequences of food aid interventions were revealed.

Findings relating to this particular research sample showed how experiences of food insecurity extend beyond issues of physical access and availability. Cultural, social, and relational dynamics that shape how food is accessed, accepted, and experienced are encompassed. It has been shown how these findings align with social exclusion theories of poverty, where the erosion of status, power, and social participation is as much a factor as material deprivation.

Faith-based interventions are overtly pragmatic responses to systemic welfare shortfalls and can be viewed within the broader context of a civil society response. However, the religious nature of some food aid settings and the belief systems of the congregations within them have been shown to pose barriers to food access for some. This questions how equitable access to food aid really is. However, the urgency of food insecurity has also been shown to often override concerns about the setting from which support is accessed.

Importantly, extended food aid interventions, particularly when community-led and culturally aware, can replicate or reimagine facets of food literacy that are otherwise diminished by food insecurity. These interventions offer more than tangible support; they foster dignity, inclusion, and emotional connection through familiar and comforting practices. In doing so, they counteract aspects of social exclusion by re-establishing community ties, rebuilding confidence and facilitating belonging. Whilst limited in their ability to address the structural causes, these nonetheless play a vital role in mitigating the relational and symbolic aspects of poverty.

However, the findings of this research also indicate that, despite the potential for positive impacts from a civil society response to increasing levels of food insecurity, the sustainability of such interventions remains questionable. More critically, what could be interpreted as their growing normalisation may reflect a failure of government to uphold

its responsibilities in ensuring equitable access to food and addressing the structural causes of poverty.

Extended food aid interventions have evolved to offer increased choice and agency, yet stigma and shame persist amongst beneficiaries. This research highlights how, even with reimagined models such as social supermarkets, beneficiaries continue to experience feelings of inferiority and othering.

Importantly, the findings of this research also show how tensions are being felt by practitioners and volunteers, many of whom are at risk of moral injury as they navigate ethical dilemmas, absorb trauma, and confront systemic failures. The emotional toll of delivering food aid without adequate support structures raises serious concerns about the long-term validity of devolving welfare responsibilities to civil society.

Whilst extended food aid interventions cannot address the root causes of food insecurity, they do offer meaningful support through the replication of relational and cultural dimensions of food literacy. However, these benefits must be weighed against the risks of entrenching food aid as a permanent fixture, potentially masking the inequalities that necessitate its existence.

In summary, this research has illuminated the multifaceted and deeply interconnected nature of food literacy and food insecurity, dominant narratives that frame individual deficits as the root cause of food aid dependency have been challenged. Instead, it has been shown how structural barriers, cultural dynamics, and psychological burdens introduced by poverty create significant constraints. The repositioning of heuristic factors and the application of knowledge as distinct provides a critical lens through which adaptive behaviours can be understood.

The exploration of extended food aid interventions has shown that, whilst offering vital support, the narratives of increased dignity and reduced stigma may be challenged. Findings also indicate that it is untenable that civil society is relied upon to address what could be seen as the state's responsibility in ensuring the right to food.

### **9.3 Embedding research findings within adopted theoretical foundations**

Food insecurity, as evidenced throughout the findings presented within this research, extends beyond issues of physical access and affordability; food insecurity shapes how food is experienced, accepted, and shared within and across communities. This underscores deeply the relational and symbolic aspects of poverty (Lister, 2006). This research has also challenged deficit-based narratives by exposing how dominant groups, often unconsciously, impose their own norms and expectations, which not only risks the marginalisation and stigmatisation of those whose lived realities do not exist within these standards but is representative of a form of what Young (2002) terms symbolic violence.

Whilst extended food aid interventions can offer moments of dignity, inclusion, and emotional connection, they also risk masking deeper structural inequalities where the responsibility of the state is shifted to, and accepted by, civil society which Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman (2007) specifically cite as a root cause of social exclusion.

Moreover, this research has demonstrated that food literacy is inherently social and cultural as well as functional. Effective interventions should respect the food authenticity and food heritage needs whilst avoiding homogenisation and cultural erasure. Similarly, there is a need for recognition of the emotional and symbolic significance of food practices. In doing so, they will align more closely with the cultural integration and meaningful participation associated with social exclusion theories of poverty rather than focussing on addressing material need associated with other theories of poverty (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vroorman, 2007; Levitas, 2000).

### **9.4 Responding to the aims and objectives of this research**

The overarching aim of this research was to explore the interconnections between food insecurity and food literacy within the context of extended food aid interventions in the

United Kingdom. Specifically, the study sought to examine how these interlinkages are shaped by, and respond to, broader social, cultural, and structural forces.

To achieve this, five key objectives were established:

**1. To investigate how food insecurity impacts the ability to acquire, demonstrate, develop, and sustain the components of food literacy.**

This objective was achieved through the thematic analysis of qualitative data from stakeholders and beneficiaries, utilising a de facto codebook developed following an integrative overview of existing literature (Appendix A). Findings revealed that food insecurity limits not only access to food but also the opportunity to engage in practices. The introduction of heuristic factors as a bridge between intrinsic and extrinsic factors of food literacy further demonstrated how adaptive behaviours are employed in response to scarcity (Figure 12).

Food literacy has also been shown to consider more than individual skills and knowledge, but extends into less tangible, but no less critical, social, and cultural factors.

**2. To examine how extended food aid interventions support, hinder, or otherwise influence food literacy.**

This has been addressed through the representation and exploration of a variety of intervention models, including social supermarkets, cookery classes, community cafes, and food pantries. It has been shown that whilst interventions aim to foster dignity and inclusion there is a heightened risk of inadvertently reinforced stigma and othering. The research has highlighted potential tensions between organisational agendas and beneficiary needs.

3. To capture and critically analyse the perspectives of multiple stakeholders including practitioners, funders, commissioners, and other stakeholders engaged in extended food aid interventions alongside the beneficiaries of these.

This objective has been fulfilled through the use of robust qualitative methodology incorporating interviews, focus groups, field observation, and conversational techniques. The latter of which is an adaptation introduced to accommodate the specific needs of the research population.

This process has elicited findings of relevance, for instance, the persistence of stigma and increased risk of vicarious trauma for volunteers, that otherwise may not have been acquired through other researcher only led methods.

#### **4. To explore the wider functions of extended food aid interventions beyond food provision including their impact on elements of food literacy beyond cookery.**

Findings demonstrated that interventions often serve as spaces of belonging, facilitating cultural exchange, emotional support, and social participation. These outcomes align with broader definitions of food literacy and have contributed towards the development of the framework of component factors of food literacy within this thesis (Figure 12).

#### **4. To assess the implications of these findings for future intervention design and policy development aimed at reducing the impacts of food insecurity or improving food literacy within the United Kingdom.**

The findings of this research indicate that any future interventions targeting food literacy should ensure that they meet target audiences where they are; that is, that they understand the pre-existing abilities and contexts of target beneficiaries to ensure maximum efficacy and sustained impact.

This research also concludes that whilst civil society responses offer valuable support, their sustainability is questionable. The normalisation of food aid risks masking systemic inequalities and shifting the responsibility of ensuring that the right to food is adequately met away from the state.

Findings from this research indicate that there is a need for changes to policy which, wherever possible, minimise the need for food aid interventions as a mechanism of ensuring that households have an adequate quality and sufficient quantity of food. However, where food aid interventions are necessitated, there should be increased emphasis on supply chains that allow for a consistent, culturally appropriate variety of produce that meets needs. It is noted that the sample size and scope of this research could be considered insufficient on their own to base policy decision making upon but that a valid contribution is made.

It has been demonstrated that there is an increased likelihood of devolving responsibility to civil society to ensure that the right to food is fulfilled. Policies and practice should ensure that those working and volunteering within the sector are adequately safeguarded and resourced to accommodate the additional moral and emotional burdens associated.

## **9.5 Limitations of the research**

This research offers valuable insights into the interconnections between food literacy and food insecurity within the context of extended food aid interventions in the UK. However, several limitations must be acknowledged.

Firstly, the research is geographically limited to the United Kingdom, and whilst a geographic spread has been sought within the research sample, the generalisability of findings to other national or international contexts may be limited. Additionally, the study has primarily examined extended food aid interventions such as food pantries, social supermarkets, community cafes, and cookery interventions whilst excluding 'traditional'

food banking models. This may limit the comparative analysis of findings across the full spectrum of food aid provision.

Secondly, the qualitative methodology chosen for this research has intentionally privileged depth over breadth. The sample size, although sufficient for thematic analysis, and which has yielded rich and nuanced data, means that the findings are context-specific and not statistically generalisable. Similarly, access to specific groups, particularly those who may be food insecure but do not engage with interventions, was limited and therefore important alternative perspectives may be excluded from this research.

The reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for several biases, including recall bias, social desirability bias, and selective disclosure. Interpretation may have been influenced by the positionality of the researcher, although efforts were taken to mitigate. For instance, whilst the adoption of a constructivist ontology does not seek triangulation, commonalities between various responses were considered. The dual role of the researcher as insider, with professional experience in food literacy interventions, and outsider as academic investigator, presents a balance of strengths and risks in terms of objectivity and influence.

The scope of this research did not allow for a comprehensive exploration of intersecting domains, such as housing, welfare, and social support, or broader health inequalities, which are known to influence and be influenced by food insecurity. Whilst these were acknowledged within the research, the degree to which they influence results may require further systematic analysis to provide a holistic understanding of the issues.

Finally, the time period during which this study was undertaken was marked by political transition and economic instability. Whilst this adds relevance, the results and findings may be time-bound and subject to change as policy landscapes and contexts evolve.

## 9.6 Recommendations for future research and practice.

The findings from this research provide a foundation for multiple areas upon which further research could build. These areas would make a valuable contribution to both academic understanding and practice regarding food insecurity, food literacy, and food aid, but, potentially more significantly, offer policy makers and practitioners within the food aid sector deliverable actions to improve outcomes for beneficiaries. Similarly, research may elicit actionable insights for other actors within the wider food system, including retailers and manufacturers.

This research has provided a conceptual framework grounded in the food literacy factors identified in the data analysis. Future studies should explore *the extent* to which these various component factors are positively or negatively impacted by food insecurity and the interventions seeking to alleviate. For example, the level of positive feelings of belonging and cultural connection generated by extended food aid interventions should be explored if their wider role is to be fully evidenced and understood.

Future research should also explore the reconceptualisation of food literacy to better reflect modern food landscapes. This research finds that dominant narratives regarding food literacy often prioritise individual knowledge and skills related to cooking from scratch, budgeting, and food choice within secure environments. How such competencies are enacted within highly constrained environments shaped by affordability, availability, energy costs, time poverty, and the structure of food systems themselves has been questioned. Further work is needed to examine how evolved food literacy frameworks might more explicitly account for these conditions. Research in this area would help models remain relevant and responsive to the realities of food insecurity rather than reinforcing idealised or normative assumptions about food practices.

Relatedly, this study indicates the value of potentially distinguishing more clearly between what could be termed *culinary literacy* and *food literacy* in future research. Culinary literacy may be understood as the skills, knowledge, and confidence required

to prepare food, while food literacy encompasses heuristics and extrinsic dimensions. Further research could explore how an overemphasis on culinary literacy risks narrowing responsibility for food security to individuals, while obscuring the roles and responsibilities of other actors within the food system. This includes food producers, retailers, policymakers, educators, and charitable organisations, all of whom influence the availability, affordability, and accessibility of health-promoting foods. Examination should extend focus to the increasing role of ultra-processed foods, digital food environments, and fragmented retail landscapes such as food deserts and swamps. Examining food literacy as a shared, system-wide concern rather than an individualised competency could support more equitable and effective responses to food insecurity and its impacts.

Where this study has demonstrated that financial competence is frequently present but operates within severe material constraint, future research could examine how interventions might better integrate considerations of income adequacy, energy costs, housing stability, and food access alongside educational components. This would be particularly valuable for organisations designing programmes aimed at supporting people experiencing food insecurity, helping to avoid approaches that unintentionally reinforce stigma or responsabilisation.

Finally, future research should consider methodological approaches that enable the participation of those with lived experience of food insecurity in shaping research agendas and interpreting findings from the outset. Participatory and co-produced research would further support more grounded and accountable understandings of food literacy, ensuring that future models and interventions better reflect lived realities. Such approaches would be valuable in supporting organisations and policymakers to design responses that are both effective and experienced as dignified.

This research highlights a notable disconnect between stakeholder perceptions of dignity within evolved food aid models and the ways in which interventions are experienced by beneficiaries. While practitioners and organisations frequently describe EFAIS as offering increased choice, agency, and dignity, beneficiaries' continued use of the term 'food bank' suggests that these distinctions are not always meaningful in

practice. Organisations delivering EFAls should therefore critically reflect upon how dignity is operationalised and communicated, moving beyond structural changes in delivery models to consider how stigma, shame, and social positioning are experienced relationally. Whilst demonstrably a response to challenges to supply and capacity, this includes examining the language used within settings, the visibility of surveillance or control mechanisms, and the extent to which beneficiaries are able to feel marked out as 'other'.

Food redistribution organisations and charities are encouraged to re-examine the balance between volume driven supply models and the quality, appropriateness, and usability of food distributed. Particularly where the ability to apply food related knowledge or leverage extrinsic factors of food literacy is constrained and perpetuates the perception that EFAls are the preserve of 'second class citizens'. Greater attention to food quality, consistency, usability, and alignment with community needs would better support both dietary adequacy and the meaningful application of food literacy within food insecure contexts.

The findings further suggest that extended food aid interventions have the potential to function as important spaces of social and cultural connection, which may help mitigate some of the social exclusion associated with food insecurity and its limiting effects on food literacy. Community meals, shared eating practices, and peer informed cookery sessions emerge as particularly valuable when they are non-presumptive, culturally responsive, and grounded in mutual exchange rather than notions of behaviour change or skills correction.

## References

Achtziger, A. (2022) 'Overspending, debt, and poverty', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 46, p. 101342., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101342>.

Action against Hunger (2025) United Kingdom, Action Against Hunger., Available at: <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org.uk/our-impact/where-we-work/united-kingdom>, (Accessed: 5 July 2025).

Adams, J. and White, M. (2015) 'Prevalence and socio-demographic correlates of time spent cooking by adults in the 2005 UK Time Use Survey. Cross-sectional analysis', *Appetite*, 92, pp. 185–191., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2015.05.022>.

Adams, J. et al. (2011) 'Research to support the evaluation and implementation of adult cooking skills interventions in the UK: phase 1 report'.

Agar, M. (2011) 'Making sense of one other for another: Ethnography as translation', *Language & Communication*, 31(1), pp. 38–47., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2010.05.001>.

Alliance for Dignified Food Support (2025) Bringing people together to embed dignity into community food support, Alliance for Dignified Food Support., Available at: <https://www.alliancefordignifiedfoodsupport.org.uk>, (Accessed: 6 August 2025).

Almansouri, M. et al. (2021) 'Exploration of heritage food concept', *Trends in Food Science & Technology*, 111, pp. 790–797., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tifs.2021.01.013>.

Arthurson, K., and Jacobs, K. (2004) 'A Critique of the Concept of Social Exclusion and its Utility for Australian Social Housing Policy', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 39(1), pp. 25–40., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1839-4655.2004.tb01161.x>.

Atkinson, A. B. and Hills, J. (1998) 'Exclusion, Employment and Opportunity'. Available at: <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/social-exclusion-poverty-and-unemployment/>, (Accessed: 24 August 2023).

BBC (2022a) 'King Charles' first Christmas speech - text in full', *BBC News*, 25 December., Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-64091433>, (Accessed: 5 November 2024).

BBC (2022b) 'Tory MP Lee Anderson branded out of touch for food bank remarks', *BBC News*, 11 May., Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-61414951>, (Accessed: 14 August 2025).

BBC (2025) Cambridge is divided by a 12-year gap in healthy life expectancy, *BBC News*., Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crkxdpz16jvo>, (Accessed: 28 May 2025).

Barbour, R. S. (2014) *Introducing qualitative research: a student's guide*. 2. ed. Los Angeles, Calif.: SAGE.

Barford, A. and Gray, M. (2022) 'The tattered state: Falling through the social safety net', *Geoforum*, 137, pp. 115–125., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2022.09.020>.

Barton, K. L., Wrieden, W. L. and Anderson, A. S. (2011) 'Validity and reliability of a short questionnaire for assessing the impact of cooking skills interventions', *Journal of human nutrition and dietetics*, 24(6), pp. 588–595., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-277X.2011.01180.x>.

Beacom, E. et al. (2020) 'Stakeholder-informed considerations for a food poverty definition', *British Food Journal*, 123(2), pp. 441–454., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-03-2020-0237>.

Beacom, E. et al. (2021) 'Food poverty contributors: individual, structural or political? Examining stakeholder perspectives using interviews and nominal group technique', *British Food Journal*, 123(6), pp. 2199–2215., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-09-2020-0817>.

Beatty, T. K., Nanney, M. S. and Tuttle, C. (2014) 'Time to eat? The relationship between food security and food-related time use', *Public Health Nutrition*, 17(1), pp. 66–72., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980012005599>.

Begley, A. et al. (2019) 'Identifying participants who would benefit the most from an adult food-literacy program', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(7)., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16071272>.

Begley, A., Gallegos, D. and Vidgen, H. (2017) 'Effectiveness of Australian cooking skill interventions', *British Food Journal*, 119(5), pp. 973–991., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-10-2016-0451>.

Bernaschi, D. et al. (2023) 'The Social Exclusion Perspective of Food Insecurity: The Case of Blacked-Out Food Areas', *Sustainability*, 15(4), p. 2974., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15042974>.

Berning, J., Cleary, R. and Bonanno, A. (2023) 'Food insecurity and time use in elderly vs. non-elderly: An exploratory analysis', *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*, 45(1), pp. 280–299. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/aepp.13275>.

Blake, M. K. (2019) 'More than just food: Food insecurity and resilient place making through community self-organising', *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 11(10)., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11102942>.

Block, L. G. et al. (2011) 'From Nutrients to Nurturance: A Conceptual Introduction to Food Well-Being', *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 30(1), pp. 5–13., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1509/jppm.30.1.5>.

Boch, A., Jiménez, T. and Roesler, K. (2021) 'Mainstream Flavor: Ethnic Cuisine and Assimilation in the United States', *Social Currents*, 8(1), pp. 64–85., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329496520948169>.

Bocquier, A. et al. (2015) 'Socio-economic characteristics, living conditions and diet quality are associated with food insecurity in France', *Public Health Nutrition*, 18(16), pp. 2952–2961., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980014002912>.

Bowen, S. and Hardison-Moody, A. (2023) 'Improving Unequal Food Access Requires Understanding and Addressing the Social Inequalities That Contribute to It', *American Journal of Public Health*, 113(4), pp. 353–355., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2023.307243>.

Bowen, S., Brenton, J. and Elliott, S. (2019) *Pressure Cooker: Why Home Cooking Won't Solve Our Problems and What We Can Do about It*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated.

Bowling, A. (2008) *Research methods in health: investigating health and health services*. 2. ed., repr. Buckingham: Open Univ. Press.

Bradshaw, T. K. (2007) 'Theories of Poverty and Anti-Poverty Programs in Community Development', *Community Development*, 38(1), pp. 7–25., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330709490182>.

Brady, D. (2019) 'Theories of the Causes of Poverty', Available at: <http://rszarf.ips.uw.edu.pl/inequality/brady2019.pdf>, (Accessed: 24 August 2023).

Bragg, M. A. et al. (2025) 'Rewriting the Narrative: Advancing Justice and Equity in the U. S. Food System', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 22(4), p. 638., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph22040638>.

Bramley, G. (2016) 'Structure rather than behaviour: on the causes of poverty', *British Politics and Policy at LSE*, 2 February., Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/what-causes-poverty/>, (Accessed: 17 July 2023).

Bramley, G., Sosenko, F. and Fitzpatrick, S. (2018) 'Destitution in the UK 2017: Technical report', Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17861/BRAMLEY2018>.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2013) *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2022) *Thematic analysis: a practical guide*. Los Angeles London New Delhi Singapore Washington DC Melbourne: SAGE.  
Breadline Europe. Policy Press, pp. 357–384., Available at:  
<https://doi.org/10.51952/9781447366584.ch015>.

Bristol, U. of (2023) *Defining Poverty in the 21st century | Research | University of Bristol*, University of Bristol. University of Bristol., Available at:  
<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/research/impact/defining-poverty-21st-century/>, (Accessed: 7 March 2023).

Brockington, D. and Henson, S. (2015) ‘Signifying the public: Celebrity advocacy and post-democratic politics’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 18(4), pp. 431–448., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877914528532>.

Brooke, C. (2019) *Prue Leith slams the nation’s culinary skills*, Mail Online., Available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6991187/Prue-Leith-slams-nations-culinary-skills.html>, (Accessed: 12 May 2025).

Brownell, K. (2020) ‘E79: Andy Fisher on Exploring the Connection Between Industry and Food Banks’, World Food Policy Center., Available at: <https://wfpc.sanford.duke.edu/podcasts/andy-fisher-exploring-connection-between-industry-and-food-banks/>, (Accessed: 23 August 2025).

Bublitz, M. et al. (2011) (PDF) *The Quest for Eating Right: Advancing Food Well-being* AUTHOR(S), ResearchGate., Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266288368\\_The\\_Quest\\_for\\_Eating\\_Right\\_Advancing\\_Food\\_Well-being\\_AUTHORS](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266288368_The_Quest_for_Eating_Right_Advancing_Food_Well-being_AUTHORS), (Accessed: 16 August 2025).

Burton, M. et al. (2017) ‘Food skills confidence and household gatekeepers’ dietary practices’, *Appetite*, 108, pp. 183–190., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2016.09.033>.

Butcher, L. M. et al. (2018) ‘What Drives Food Insecurity in Western Australia? How the Perceptions of People at Risk Differ to Those of Stakeholders’, *Nutrients*, 10(8), p. 1059., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu10081059>.

Byrne, D. (2022) ‘A worked example of Braun and Clarke’s approach to reflexive thematic analysis’, *Quality & Quantity*, 56(3), pp. 1391–1412., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>.

Cairns, B., Harris, M. and Hutchison, R. (2007) ‘Sharing God’s love or meeting government goals? Local churches and public policy implementation’, *Policy & Politics*, 35(3), pp. 413–432., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557307781571614>.

Cambridge Dictionary (2023) <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/stakeholder.>, Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/stakeholder>, (Accessed: 15 December 2023).

Caraher, M. and Davison, R. (2019) 'The normalisation of food aid: what happened to feeding people well?', Emerald Open Research, 1(6)., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/EOR-06-2023-0001>.

Caraher, M. and Dowler, E. (2014) 'Food for Poorer People: Conventional and "Alternative" Transgressions?', Available at: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/3046/1/CaraherDowlerFINAL.pdf>.

Caraher, M. et al. (1999) 'The state of cooking in England: the relationship of cooking skills to food choice', British food journal (1966), 101(8), pp. 590–609., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/00070709910288289>.

Caraher, M., Lang, T. and Dixon, P. (2000) '(PDF) The Influence of TV and Celebrity Chefs on Public Attitudes and Behavior Among the English Public', ResearchGate [Preprint]., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2752/152897900786690805>.

Caraher, M., Wu, M. and Seeley, A. (2010) 'Should we teach cooking in schools? A systematic review of the literature of school-based cooking interventions'., Available at: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/7878/1/JHEIA17-1-2.pdf>.

Chase, E. and Walker, R. (2012) 'The Co-construction of Shame in the Context of Poverty: Beyond a Threat to the Social Bond - Elaine Chase, Robert Walker, 2013'., Available at: <https://doi-org.ezproxy.herts.ac.uk/10.1177/0038038512453796>.

Chen, W. (2016) 'From "Junk Food " to "Treats": How Poverty Shapes Family Food Practices', Food, Culture & Society, 19(1), pp. 151–170., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2016.1145008>.

Clark, D., Nagler, R. H. and Niederdeppe, J. (2019) 'Confusion and nutritional backlash from news media exposure to contradictory information about carbohydrates and dietary fats', Public Health Nutrition, 22(18), pp. 3336–3348., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980019002866>.

Cohen, D. A. and Babey, S. H. (2012) 'Contextual Influences on Eating Behaviors: Heuristic Processing and Dietary Choices', Obesity reviews : an official journal of the International Association for the Study of Obesity, 13(9), pp. 766–779., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-789X.2012.01001.x>.

Conservatives (2015) 'The Conservative Party Manifesto 2015'., Available at: <https://www.theresavilliers.co.uk/sites/www.theresavilliers.co.uk/files/conservativemanifesto2015.pdf>.

Coveney, J., Begley, A. and Gallegos, D. (2012) "'Savoir Fare": Are cooking skills a new morality?', Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 52(3), pp. 617–642., Available at: <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ehh&AN=95404923&site=ehost-live>, (Accessed: 19 June 2023).

Creswell, J. W. (2009) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*. 2. ed., [Nachdr.]. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Cretney, R. (2014) 'Resilience for Whom? Emerging Critical Geographies of Socio-ecological Resilience: Resilience of What, for Whom?', *Geography Compass*, 8(9), pp. 627–640., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12154>.

Cullen, T. et al. (2015) 'Food Literacy: Definition and Framework for Action', *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research*, 76(3), pp. 140–145., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3148/cjdpr-2015-010>.

DEFRA (2025) *A UK government food strategy for England, considering the wider UK food system*, GOV. UK., Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-uk-government-food-strategy-for-england/a-uk-government-food-strategy-for-england-considering-the-wider-uk-food-system>, (Accessed: 17 August 2025).

Davis, E. P. and Sanchez-Martinez, M. (2014) 'Review of the economic theories of poverty', Available at: [https://www.niesr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/dp435\\_0.pdf](https://www.niesr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/dp435_0.pdf), (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Davison, K. M., Gondara, L. and Kaplan, B. J. (2017) 'Food Insecurity, Poor Diet Quality, and Suboptimal Intakes of Folate and Iron Are Independently Associated with Perceived Mental Health in Canadian Adults', *Nutrients*, 9(3), p. 274., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu9030274>.

De Souza, R. T. (2019) *Feeding the Other: Whiteness, Privilege, and Neoliberal Stigma in Food Pantries*. The MIT Press., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11701.001.0001>.

Department for Communities & Local Government (2011) 'A Plain English Guide to the Localism Act'.

Desjardins, E. et al. (2013) 'A locally driven collaborative project funded by public Health ONTARIO, 2013 Technical Report', Available at: <https://farmtoschool.phabc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/12/Food-Literacy-Study-Ontario-Dec-2013-2.pdf>, (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Devereux, S., Béné, C. and Hoddinott, J. (2020) 'Conceptualising COVID-19's impacts on household food security', *Food Security*, 12(4), pp. 769–772., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-020-01085-0>.

Dewar, M., Paradis, A. and Brillon, P. (2023) 'Morally injurious events among aid workers: examining the indirect effect of negative cognitions and self-care in associations with mental health indicators', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, p. 1171629. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1171629>.

Dibb, S. and Carrigan, M. (2013) 'Social marketing transformed: Kotler, Polonsky and Hastings reflect on social marketing in a period of social change', *European Journal of Marketing*. Edited by S. Dibb and Marylyn Carrigan, 47(9), pp. 1376–1398., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-05-2013-0248>.

Dillon, A. and Wentworth, J. (2024) 'Food systems, food security and supply chains', Available at: <https://post.parliament.uk/food-systems-food-security-and-supply-chains/>, (Accessed: 31 July 2025).

Dimbleby H. (2021) *The National Food Strategy - The Plan*, National Food Strategy., Available at: <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/>, (Accessed: 22 February 2023).

Donnison, D. (1998) *Policies for a Just Society*. London: Macmillan Education UK., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-26058-4>.

Dorn, F. et al. (2024) 'A bivariate relative poverty line for leisure time and income poverty: Detecting intersectional differences using distributional copulas', *Review of Income and Wealth*, 70(2), pp. 395–419., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/roiw.12635>.

Dowler, E. A. and O'Connor, D. (2012) 'Rights-based approaches to addressing food poverty and food insecurity in Ireland and UK', *Social Science & Medicine*, 74(1), pp. 44–51., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.08.036>.

Doyle, J. (2014) 'The poor still can't cook', *History & Policy*., Available at: <https://historyandpolicy.org/opinion-articles/articles/the-poor-still-cant-cook/>, (Accessed: 12 May 2025).

Earnshaw, V. A. and Karpyn, A. (2021) 'Understanding stigma and food inequity: a conceptual framework to inform research, intervention, and policy', *Translational Behavioral Medicine*, 10(6), pp. 1350–1357., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibaa087>.

Economics Observatory (2024) 'Update: how is the war in Ukraine affecting global food prices?', *Economics Observatory*., Available at: <https://www.economicsobservatory.com/update-how-is-the-war-ukraine-affecting-global-food-prices>, (Accessed: 13 August 2025).

Edmiston, D. (2022) 'Plumbing the Depths: The Changing (Socio-Demographic) Profile of UK Poverty', *Journal of Social Policy*, 51(2), pp. 385–411., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279421000180>.

Eicher-Miller, H. A. et al. (2023) 'A Scoping Review of Household Factors Contributing to Dietary Quality and Food Security in Low-Income Households with School-Age Children in the United States', *Advances in Nutrition*, 14(4), pp. 914–945., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.advnut.2023.05.006>.

Ericksen, P. J. (2008) 'Conceptualizing food systems for global environmental change research', *Global Environmental Change*, 18(1), pp. 234–245., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2007.09.002>.

Evans, A. et al. (2015) 'Increasing access to healthful foods: A qualitative study with residents of low-income communities', *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 12(1)., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1479-5868-12-S1-S5>.

Evans, S. (2023) 'How Food Banks Can Honor Cultural Traditions', SLO Food Bank, 19 July., Available at: <https://slofoodbank.org/en/food-as-culture/>, (Accessed: 11 July 2025).

FAO (2023) *Hunger*, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations., Available at: <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>, (Accessed: 24 August 2023).

FareShare (2025) 'Our impact', FareShare., Available at: <https://fareshare.org.uk/what-we-do/our-impact/>, (Accessed: 11 August 2025).

FeedBack (2025) 'Used by: How businesses dump their waste on food charities'.

Feldman, G. (2019) 'Neoliberalism and poverty: An unbreakable relationship', in., Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336700342> Neoliberalism and poverty: An unbreakable relationship, (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Flego, A. et al. (2014) 'Jamie's Ministry of Food: Quasi-experimental evaluation of immediate and sustained impacts of a cooking skills program in Australia', *PloS one*. Edited by M. Kirk, 9(12), pp. e114673–e114673., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0114673>.

Food Ethics Council (2014) 'Household Food Security in the UK: A Review of Food Aid Final Report'., Available at: <https://www.foodethicscouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2014%20Household%20food%20insecurity%20in%20the%20UK.pdf>, (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Food Foundation (2025) Latest food insecurity tracker shows seven million adults going hungry | Food Foundation, The Food Foundation., Available at: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/news/latest-food-insecurity-tracker-shows-seven-million-adults-going-hungry>, (Accessed: 13 August 2025).

Food Foundation (2025) The Broken Plate 2025 | Food Foundation., Available at: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/broken-plate-2025>, (Accessed: 27 August 2025).

Food Literacy Center (2015) About, Food Literacy Center., Available at: <https://www.foodliteracycenter.org/about>, (Accessed: 13 July 2023).

Food Standards Agency (2024) FSA consumer survey shows around one in four people are still food insecure | Food Standards Agency., Available at: <https://www.food.gov.uk/news-alerts/news/fsa-consumer-survey-shows-around-one-in-four-people-are-still-food-insecure>, (Accessed: 27 August 2025).

Foster, J. *et al.* (2023) 'Trading Blame: Drawing Boundaries around the Righteous, Deserving and Vulnerable in Times of Crisis', *Sociology*, 57(5), pp. 1040–1059. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385221137181>.

Francis-Devine, B. *et al.* (2025) 'Rising cost of living in the UK', UK Parliament [Preprint]., Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9428/>, (Accessed: 14 August 2025).

Franks, H. *et al.* (2012) 'Public health interventions and behaviour change: Reviewing the grey literature', *Public Health*, 126(1), pp. 12–17., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2011.09.023>.

Fraser, K. *et al.* (2024) 'Mapping the behaviour change potential of meal kits to positively influence parental food literacy', *Public Health Nutrition*, 27(1), p. e16., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S136898002300263X>.

French Jeff (2014) (27) Up-stream, Mid-stream and Down-Stream Social Marketing. Defining the term | LinkedIn., Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140819142011-50216498-up-stream-mid-stream-and-down-stream-social-marketing-defining-the-term/>, (Accessed: 26 June 2023).

French, L., Hanna, P. and Huckle, C. (2021) '(PDF) "If I die, they do not care": U.K. National Health Service staff experiences of betrayal-based moral injury during COVID-19', *ResearchGate* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001134>.

Furey, S. (2025) 'Charitable Food Aid and Distribution', *Oxford Bibliographies in Food Studies* [Preprint].

Furey, S., McIlveen, H. and Strugnell, C. (1999) 'Food Deserts: An Issue of Social Justice', *M/C Journal*, 2(7)., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.1799>.

GOV. UK (2018) The Eatwell Guide, GOV. UK., Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide>, (Accessed: 16 February 2023).

GOV. UK (2024) Civil Society Covenant Framework launch, GOV. UK., Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-society-covenant-framework-launch>, (Accessed: 3 August 2025).

Galperin, B. L. *et al.* (2022) 'An emic-etic-emic research cycle for understanding context in under-researched countries', *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 22(1), pp. 7–35., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705958221075534>.

Garcia, A. L. et al. (2014) 'Evaluation of a cooking skills programme in parents of young children – a longitudinal study', *Public health nutrition*, 17(5), pp. 1013–1021., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980013000165>.

Garcia, A. L. et al. (2016) 'Community Interventions to Improve Cooking Skills and Their Effects on Confidence and Eating Behaviour', *Current Nutrition Reports*, 5(4), pp. 315–322., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13668-016-0185-3>.

Gard, B. (2020) *Vicarious Trauma, Mirror Neurons, and COVID-19 | Psychology Today United Kingdom, Psychology Today*. Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/psychological-trauma-coping-and-resilience/202012/vicarious-trauma-mirror-neurons-and-covid-19> (Accessed: 7 August 2025).

Garg, R. (2016) 'Methodology for research I', *Indian Journal of Anaesthesia*, 60(9), pp. 640–645., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5049.190619>.

Garratt, E. (2017) 'Please sir, I want some more: an exploration of repeat foodbank use', *BMC Public Health*, 17(1), p. 828., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-017-4847-x>.

Garthwaite, K. (2016) *Hunger pains: life inside foodbank Britain*. Bristol: Policy press.

Gigerenzer, G. (2005) 'I Think, Therefore I Err', *Social Research*, 72(1), pp. 195–218., Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40972008>, (Accessed: 21 March 2025).

Gladwell, M. (2015) *The tipping point: how little things can make a big difference*. Paperback edition. London: Abacus.

Goode, J. (2012) 'Feeding the Family When the Wolf's at the Door: The Impact of Over-Indebtedness on Contemporary Foodways in Low-Income Families in the UK', *Food and Foodways*, 20(1), pp. 8–30., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07409710.2012.652016>.

Gordon, D. (2017) *Producing the PSE poverty line | Poverty and Social Exclusion.*, Available at: <https://www.poverty.ac.uk/editorial/producing-pse-poverty-line>, (Accessed: 7 September 2023).

Gordon, R. (2013) 'Unlocking the potential of upstream social marketing', *European Journal of Marketing*. Edited by S. Dibb and Marylyn Carrigan, 47(9), pp. 1525–1547., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-09-2011-0523>.

Government Office for Science (2024) *Ultra-Processed Food - HTML*, GOV. UK., Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ultra-processed-food-upfs/ultra-processed-food-html>, (Accessed: 15 February 2025).

Greene, R. R., Galambos, C. and Lee, Y. (2003) 'Resilience theory: Theoretical and professional conceptualizations', *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 8(4), pp. 75–91., Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1300/J137v08n04\\_05](https://doi.org/10.1300/J137v08n04_05).

Greene, R. R., Galambos, C. and Lee, Y. (2003) 'Resilience theory: Theoretical and professional conceptualizations', *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 8(4), pp. 75–91., Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1300/J137v08n04\\_05](https://doi.org/10.1300/J137v08n04_05).

Griffith, R., Jin, W. (Michelle) and Lechene, V. (2022) 'The decline of home-cooked food', *Fiscal Studies*, 43(2), pp. 105–120., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-5890.12298>.

Griss, H. (2025) 'A year of "change"? A look at Labour's progress on poverty', *Resolve Poverty*, 1 July., Available at: <https://www.resolvepoverty.org/a-year-of-change-a-look-at-labours-progress-on-poverty/>, (Accessed: 20 August 2025).

Haan, A. D. (1998) "'SocialExclusion": An Alternative Concept for the Study of Deprivation?', *IDS Bulletin*, 29(1), pp. 10–19., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.1998.mp29001002.x>.

Hamm, M. W. and Bellows, A. C. (2003) 'Community Food Security and Nutrition Educators', *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 35(1), pp. 37–43., Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1499-4046\(06\)60325-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1499-4046(06)60325-4).

Hammarberg, K., Kirkman, M. and de Lacey, S. (2016) 'Qualitative research methods: when to use them and how to judge them', *Human Reproduction*, 31(3), pp. 498–501., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/humrep/dev334>.

Hanson, S. and Porter, B. (2025) A qualitative exploration of a financial inclusion service in an English foodbank., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/17579139231180755>.

Hardin-Fanning, F., Ross, R. and Sha, S. (2025) 'Cross-Sectional Analysis of Factors Predicting Food Assistance Stigma', *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(7), p. 897. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15070897>.

Harris, J. L., Brownell, K. D. and Bargh, J. A. (2009) 'The Food Marketing Defense Model: Integrating Psychological Research to Protect Youth and Inform Public Policy', *Social issues and policy review*, 3(1), pp. 211–271., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-2409.2009.01015.x>.

Hartmann, C., Dohle, S. and Siegrist, M. (2013) 'Importance of cooking skills for balanced food choices', *Appetite*, 65, pp. 125–131., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2013.01.016>.

Hawley, C. N. et al. (2021) 'Cooking for Health: a healthy food budgeting, purchasing, and cooking skills randomized controlled trial to improve diet among American Indians with

type 2 diabetes', *BMC Public Health*, 21(1), p. 356., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10308-8>.

Healy, A. E. (2019) 'Measuring food poverty in Ireland: The importance of including exclusion', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 27(2), pp. 105–127., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0791603519828313>.

Hecht, A. A. and Neff, R. A. (2019) 'Food Rescue Intervention Evaluations: A Systematic Review', *Sustainability*, 11(23), p. 6718., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11236718>.

Hernandez, K. J. et al. (2021) 'Towards a common understanding of food literacy: a pedagogical framework', *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation*, 8(4)., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v8i4.467>.

Hesse-Biber, S. N. and Leavy, P. (2013) *Handbook of Emergent Methods*. New York: Guilford Publications., Available at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/herts/detail.action?docID=340798>, (Accessed: 7 November 2023).

Hick, R. (2012) 'The Capability Approach: Insights for a New Poverty Focus', *Journal of Social Policy*, 41(2), pp. 291–308., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279411000845>.

Himmelweit, S. (2007) 'The prospects for caring: economic theory and policy analysis', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 31(4), pp. 581–599., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/bem011>.

Hirsch, D. and Karagiannaki, E. (2024) 'CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE?' abrdrn Financial Fairness Trust.

Hossain, N. et al. (2011) 'The Impact of the Global Economic Downturn on Communities and Poverty in the UK'., Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265656851>, (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Huddleston-Casas, C., Charnigo, R. and Simmons, L. A. (2009) 'Food insecurity and maternal depression in rural, low-income families: a longitudinal investigation', *Public Health Nutrition*, 12(8), pp. 1133–1140., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980008003650>.

Huisken, A., Orr, S. K. and Tarasuk, V. (2016) 'Adults' food skills and use of gardens are not associated with household food insecurity in Canada', *Canadian journal of public health*, 107(6), pp. e526–e532., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17269/CJPH.107.5692>.

Hunter, E. et al. (2025) "'We go hunting ...': Understanding experiences of people living with obesity and food insecurity when shopping for food in the supermarket to meet their weight related goals', *Appetite*, 205, p. 107794., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2024.107794>.

Hutchinson, J. et al. (2016) 'Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Ministry of Food cooking programme on self-reported food consumption and confidence with cooking', *Public health nutrition*, 19(18), pp. 3417–3427., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980016001476>.

Ingram, J. (2011) 'A food systems approach to researching food security and its interactions with global environmental change', *Food Security*, 3., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-011-0149-9>.

Jackson, P. (2020) *Food words: essays in culinary culture*. London, England: Bloomsbury Academic., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350042278>.

Janatabadi, F., Newing, A. and Ermagun, A. (2024) 'Social and spatial inequalities of contemporary food deserts: A compound of store and online access to food in the United Kingdom', *Applied Geography*, 163, p. 103184., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2023.103184>.

Jansen, H. (2010) 'The Logic of Qualitative Survey Research and its Position in the field of Social Research Methods', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11(2)., Available at: <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1002110>, (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

Jayasinghe, S., Byrne, N. M. and Hills, A. P. (2025) 'Cultural influences on dietary choices', *Progress in Cardiovascular Diseases* [Preprint]., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcad.2025.02.003>.

Jehoel-Gijsbers G. and Vroorman, J. (2007) *Explaining Social Exclusion; A Theoretical Model Tested in The Netherlands.*, Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236981206\\_Explaining\\_Social\\_Exclusion\\_A\\_Theoretical\\_Model\\_Testedin\\_The\\_Netherlands](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236981206_Explaining_Social_Exclusion_A_Theoretical_Model_Testedin_The_Netherlands), (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2009) *Poverty, inequality and policy since 1997*, JRF., Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-inequality-and-policy-1997>, (Accessed: 18 February 2022).

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023) *Overall UK Poverty rates | JRF, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.*, Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/data/overall-uk-poverty-rates>, (Accessed: 16 March 2023).

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025) *UK Poverty 2025: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK | Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.*, Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2025-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>, (Accessed: 13 August 2025).

Katz, M. B. (2013) *The Undeserving Poor: America's Enduring Confrontation with Poverty: Fully Updated and Revised*. Cary, UNITED STATES: Oxford University Press,

Incorporated., Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/herts/detail.action?docID=1389039>, (Accessed: 24 August 2023).

Kelleher, E. et al. (2017) 'Barriers and facilitators to initial and continued attendance at community-based lifestyle programmes among families of overweight and obese children: a systematic review', *Obesity Reviews*, 18(2), pp. 183–194., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/obr.12478>.

Kelly, B. et al. (2015) 'A Hierarchy of Unhealthy Food Promotion Effects: Identifying Methodological Approaches and Knowledge Gaps', *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(4), pp. e86–e95., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302476>.

Knol, L. L. et al. (2019) 'Very Low Food Security Status is Related to Lower Cooking Self-Efficacy and Less Frequent Food Preparation Behaviors Among College Students', *Journal of nutrition education and behavior*, 51(3), pp. 357–363., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2018.10.009>.

Kolasa, K. M. et al. (2001) 'Food Literacy Partners Program: A Strategy To Increase Community Food Literacy', *Topics in Clinical Nutrition*, 16(4), p. 1., Available at: [https://journals.lww.com/topicsinclinicalnutrition/Abstract/2001/16040/Food\\_Literacy\\_Partners\\_Program\\_\\_A\\_Strategy\\_To.2.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/topicsinclinicalnutrition/Abstract/2001/16040/Food_Literacy_Partners_Program__A_Strategy_To.2.aspx), (Accessed: 11 April 2023).

Korstjens, I. and Moser, A. (2017) 'Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 2: Context, research questions and designs', *The European Journal of General Practice*, 23(1), pp. 274–279., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375090>.

Krause, C. et al. (2018) 'Just a subtle difference? Findings from a systematic review on definitions of nutrition literacy and food literacy', *Health Promotion International*, 33(3), pp. 378–389., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daw084>.

Krause, C. et al. (2018) 'Just a subtle difference? Findings from a systematic review on definitions of nutrition literacy and food literacy', *Health Promotion International*, 33(3), pp. 378–389., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daw084>.

Lakhani, N. and Uteuova, A. (2021) 'The hunger industry: does charity put a Band-Aid on American inequality?', *The Guardian*, 28 April., Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/apr/28/our-unequal-earth-food-insecurity-aid-corporate>, (Accessed: 7 March 2023).

Lambie-Mumford, H. (2014) 'Household Food Security in the UK: A Review of Food Aid Executive Summary'.

Lambie-Mumford, H. (2019) 'The growth of food banks in Britain and what they mean for social policy', *Critical Social Policy*, 39(1), pp. 3–22., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018318765855>.

Lambie-Mumford, H. and Dowler, E. (2014) 'Rising use of "food aid" in the United Kingdom', *British Food Journal*. Edited by P. Martin Caraher and Dr Alessio Cavicchi, 116(9), pp. 1418–1425., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-06-2014-0207>.

Lambie-Mumford, H. and Dowler, E. (2015) 'Some Useful Sources', *Social Policy and Society*, 14(3), pp. 507–508. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746415000160>.

Lang, T. and Caraher, M. (2001) 'Is there a culinary skills transition? Data and debate from the UK about changes in cooking culture', *Journal of the Home Economics Institute of Australia*, 8., Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238679603>, (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Lavelle, F. et al. (2019) 'Modern transference of domestic cooking skills', *Nutrients*, 11(4), p. 870., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu11040870>.

Lawlis, T. et al. (2019) 'The food literacy action logic model: A tertiary education sector innovative strategy to support the charitable food sectors need for food literacy training', *Nutrients*, 11(4), p. 837., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu11040837>.

Lee, J.-K. et al. (2021) 'Institutional and behaviour-change interventions to support COVID-19 public health measures: a review by the Lancet Commission Task Force on public health measures to suppress the pandemic', *International Health*, 13(5), pp. 399–409., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/inthealth/ihab022>.

Leung, C. W. et al. (2014) 'Food Insecurity Is Inversely Associated with Diet Quality of Lower-Income Adults', *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 114(12), pp. 1943-1953.e2., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2014.06.353>.

Levitas, R. (2000) 'What is social exclusion?', in D. Gordon and P. Townsend (eds)

Levitas, R. (2005) *The Inclusive Society?: Social Exclusion and New Labour*. London, UNITED KINGDOM: Palgrave Macmillan UK., Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/herts/detail.action?docID=259509>, (Accessed: 29 June 2025).

Lister, R. (2006) *Poverty*. Repr. Cambridge: Polity (Key concepts).

Liu, L. et al. (2024) 'Impacts of Poverty and Lifestyles on Mortality: A Cohort Study in Predominantly Low-Income Americans', *American journal of preventive medicine*, 67(1), pp. 15–23., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2024.02.015>.

Loopstra, R. and Lalor, D. (2017) 'Financial insecurity, food insecurity, and disability: The profile of people receiving emergency food assistance from The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network in Britain', Available at: [https://ealing.foodbank.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/183/2017/06/OU\\_Report\\_final\\_01\\_08\\_online.pdf](https://ealing.foodbank.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/183/2017/06/OU_Report_final_01_08_online.pdf).

Lupton, D. (1996) *Food, the Body and the Self*. London, UNITED KINGDOM: SAGE Publications, Limited. Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/herts/detail.action?docID=1024110> (Accessed: 24 August 2023).

MacKinnon, C. et al. (2014) 'Identification of Best Practices in Nutrition Education for Low-Income Audiences', *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 46(4, Supplement), p. S152., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2014.04.144>.

Mack, J. (2016) Deprivation and poverty | Poverty and Social Exclusion, PSE Poverty and Social Exclusion., Available at: <https://www.poverty.ac.uk/definitions-poverty/deprivation-and-poverty/>, (Accessed: 6 July 2025).

Main, G. and Bradshaw, J. (2012) 'Child poverty and social exclusion: Final report of 2012 PSE study'., Available at: <https://www.poverty.ac.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/PSE-Child-poverty-and-exclusion-final-report-2014.pdf>, (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Mani, A. et al. (2013) 'Poverty impedes cognitive function', *Science (New York, N. Y.)*, 341(6149), pp. 976–980., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1238041>.

Masten, A. S. (2014) 'Global Perspectives on Resilience in Children and Youth', *Child Development*, 85(1), pp. 6–20., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12205>.

McGowan, L. et al. (2016) 'The influence of socio-demographic, psychological and knowledge-related variables alongside perceived cooking and food skills abilities in the prediction of diet quality in adults: A nationally representative cross-sectional study', *The international journal of behavioral nutrition and physical activity*, 13(1), pp. 111–111., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-016-0440-4>.

Mckendrick, J. (2023) 'Ingredients for Success? A nation-wide survey of teachers and stakeholders on food education across the UK'., Available at: <https://children-ne.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/IFS-Report-FINAL-240511-1.pdf>.

Mclaughlin, C., Tarasuk, V. and Kreiger, N. (2003) 'An examination of at-home food preparation activity among low-income, food-insecure women', *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 103(11), pp. 1506–1512., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jada.2003.08.022>.

Meah, A. and Watson, M. (2011) 'Saints and Slackers: Challenging Discourses about the Decline of Domestic Cooking', *Sociological research online*, 16(2), pp. 1–13., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.2341>.

Mehtälä, M. A. K. et al. (2014) 'A socio-ecological approach to physical activity interventions in childcare: a systematic review', *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 11(1), p. 22., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1479-5868-11-22>.

Mingay, E. et al. (2021) 'Why We Eat the Way We Do: A Call to Consider Food Culture in Public Health Initiatives', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(22), p. 11967., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182211967>.

Monsivais, P., Aggarwal, A. and Drewnowski, A. (2014) 'Time Spent on Home Food Preparation and Indicators of Healthy Eating', *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 47(6), pp. 796–802. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2014.07.033>.

Moore, C. (2019) Resilience Theory: A Summary of the Research (+PDF), PositivePsychology.com., Available at: <https://positivepsychology.com/resilience-theory/>, (Accessed: 17 May 2023).

Morales, M. E. and Berkowitz, S. A. (2016) 'The Relationship between Food Insecurity, Dietary Patterns, and Obesity', *Current nutrition reports*, 5(1), pp. 54–60., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13668-016-0153-y>.

Morris, M. W. et al. (1999) 'VIEWS FROM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE: INTEGRATING EMIC AND ETIC INSIGHTS ABOUT CULTURE AND JUSTICE JUDGMENT'.

Muddiman D (2000) 'Working Paper 1: Theories of Social Exclusion and The Public L', Available at: [https://core.ac.uk/display/11879329?utm\\_source=pdf&utm\\_medium=banner&utm\\_campaign=pdf-decoration-v1](https://core.ac.uk/display/11879329?utm_source=pdf&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=pdf-decoration-v1), (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

NHS (2022) 5 A Day: what counts?, nhs.uk., Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/5-a-day/5-a-day-what-counts/>, (Accessed: 7 February 2025).

Nguyen, H. (2018) 'Sustainable food systems: Concept and framework'.

Nottingham, U. of (2023) 'Understanding Pragmatic Research', Available at: <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/helmopen/rlos/research-evidence-based-practice/designing-research/types-of-study/understanding-pragmatic-research/section07.html>, (Accessed: 1 December 2023).

Nutbeam, D. (2000) 'Health literacy as a public health goal: a challenge for contemporary health education and communication strategies into the 21st century', *Health Promotion International*, 15(3), pp. 259–267., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/15.3.259>.

Odoms-Young, A. M. (2018) 'Examining the Impact of Structural Racism on Food Insecurity: Implications for Addressing Racial/Ethnic Disparities', *Family & community health*, 41(Suppl 2 FOOD INSECURITY AND OBESITY), pp. S3–S6., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1097/FCH.000000000000183>.

Office for Health Improvements and Disparities (2022) Health disparities and health inequalities: applying All Our Health, GOV. UK., Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-disparities-and-health-inequalities-applying-all-our-health/health-disparities-and-health-inequalities-applying-all-our-health>, (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Office for Statistics Regulation (2023) 'Case example - DCLG's Indices of Deprivation', Office for Statistics Regulation., Available at: <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/guidance/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/dclgs-indices-of-deprivation/>, (Accessed: 4 April 2023).

Oldroyd, L. et al. (2022) 'The nutritional quality of food parcels provided by food banks and the effectiveness of food banks at reducing food insecurity in developed countries: a mixed-method systematic review', *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, 35(6), pp. 1202–1229., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jhn.12994>.

Olive, J. L. (2014) 'Reflecting on the Tensions Between Emic and Etic Perspectives in Life History Research: Lessons Learned', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 15(2)., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-15.2.2072>.

Orr, J. and McCamley, A. (2017) 'Evaluating the effectiveness of a community-based dietary intervention in Nottingham', *British food journal* (1966), 119(5), pp. 1091–1101., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-09-2016-0444>.

Oxford English Dictionary (2025) budget, v. meanings, etymology and more | Oxford English Dictionary., Available at: [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/budget\\_v](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/budget_v), (Accessed: 19 March 2025).

O'Connell, R. and Brannen, J. (2021) 'Families and Food in Hard Times'., Available at: <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10127576/1/Families-and-Food-in-Hard-Times.pdf>, (Accessed: 4 September 2023).

O'Connor, N., Farag, K. and Baines, R. (2016) 'What is food poverty? A conceptual framework', *British Food Journal*, 118(2), pp. 429–449., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-06-2015-0222>.

Palumbo, R. et al. (2019) 'Unravelling the food literacy puzzle: Evidence from Italy', *Food Policy*, 83, pp. 104–115., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2018.12.004>.

Pandya-Wood (2025) 'Austerity UK: The ongoing cruelty of welfare reform', *Transforming Society*, 30 July., Available at: <https://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2025/07/30/austerity-uk-the-ongoing-cruelty-of-welfare-reform/>, (Accessed: 23 August 2025).

Parsons (2010) 'Constructivism and Interpretive Theory', in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*. Third Edition. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 80–98.

Patel, S. (2023) 'The research paradigm – methodology, epistemology and ontology – explained in simple language – Dr Salma Patel', Dr Salma Patel., Available at:

<https://salmapatel.co.uk/academia/the-research-paradigm-methodology-epistemology-and-ontology-explained-in-simple-language/>, (Accessed: 19 November 2023).

Pavliukevic, A. et al. (2018) 'Eating Your Way to Integration: The Making of a Diverse Community at LSE'. Available at: <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Teaching-and-Learning-Centre/Assets/Documents/GROUPS-papers/GROUPS-2018/GROUPS-2018-Group-4-research-paper.pdf>.

Pemberton, S., Sutton, E. and Fahmy, E. (2014) 'Life on a Low Income in Austere Times'. Available at: <https://www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research/pseuk-reports>, (Accessed: 4 September 2023).

Perry, E. A. et al. (2017) 'Identifying attributes of food literacy: a scoping review', Public Health Nutrition, 20(13), pp. 2406–2415., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980017001276>.

Poelman, M. P. et al. (2018) 'Towards the measurement of food literacy with respect to healthy eating: the development and validation of the self perceived food literacy scale among an adult sample in the Netherlands', International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, 15(1), p. 54., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-018-0687-z>.

Power, M. (2022) Hunger, Whiteness and Religion in Neoliberal Britain: An Inequality of Power. 1st edn. Bristol University Press., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.46692/9781447358572>.

Power, M. and Baxter, M. (2024) 'Lived experiences of food insecurity and food charity among asylum seekers in England: racialized governance and a "culture of suspicion"', Ethnic and Racial Studies, 0(0), pp. 1–23., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2024.2399726>.

Power, M. et al. (2017) 'All in it Together? Community Food Aid in a Multi-Ethnic Context', Journal of Social Policy, 46(3), pp. 447–471., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279417000010>.

Puddephatt, J.-A. et al. (2020) "Eating to survive": A qualitative analysis of factors influencing food choice and eating behaviour in a food-insecure population', Appetite, 147, p. 104547., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2019.104547>.

QRCA (2024) When to Use Qualitative Research, QRCA., Available at: <https://www.qrca.org/page/when-to-use-qual-research>, (Accessed: 5 January 2024).

Rahman (2023) (PDF) Public Space: A Social Construct, ResearchGate., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.14128.64000>.

Ranjit, N., Macias, S. and Hoelscher, D. (2020) 'Factors related to poor diet quality in food insecure populations', *Translational Behavioral Medicine*, 10(6), pp. 1297–1305., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibaa028>.

Reid, M., Worsley, A. and Mavondo, F. (2015) 'The Obesogenic Household: Factors Influencing Dietary Gatekeeper Satisfaction with Family Diet', *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(5), pp. 544–557., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20799>.

Relton, C. et al. (2025) 'Place-based household vouchers for locally supplied fruit and vegetables: the Fresh Street pilot cluster randomised controlled trial', *BMC Public Health*, 25(1), p. 29., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-21062-y>.

Reicks, M., PhD, RD et al. (2014) 'Impact of Cooking and Home Food Preparation Interventions Among Adults: Outcomes and Implications for Future Programs', *Journal of nutrition education and behavior*, 46(4), pp. 259–276. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2014.02.001>.

Riaz, M. N. and Chaudry, M. M. (2003) *Halal Food Production*. Boca Raton: CRC Press., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1201/9780203490082>.

Riches, G. (2011) 'Thinking and acting outside the charitable food box: hunger and the right to food in rich societies', *Development in Practice*, 21(4/5), pp. 768–775., Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41412998>, (Accessed: 15 July 2025).

Riches, G. (2018) *Food bank nations: Poverty, corporate charity and the right to food*. (Food Bank Nations: Poverty, Corporate Charity and the Right to Food), p. 204., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315184012>.

Ronson, D. and Caraher, M. (2016) 'Food Banks: Big Society or Shunting Yards? Successful Failures', in M. Caraher and J. Coveney (eds) *Food Poverty and Insecurity: International Food Inequalities*. Cham: Springer International Publishing (Food Policy), pp. 79–88., Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23859-3\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23859-3_8).

Rooney, C. et al. (2017) 'How much is "5-a-day"? A qualitative investigation into consumer understanding of fruit and vegetable intake guidelines', *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, 30(1), pp. 105–113., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jhn.12393>.

Rose, K. et al. (2019) 'School food provision in England: A historical journey | Request PDF', *ResearchGate [Preprint]*., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbu.12394>.

Rubin, H. J. and Rubin, I. (1995) *Qualitative interviewing: the art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Rutter, M. (2012) 'Resilience as a dynamic concept', *Development and Psychopathology*, 24(2), pp. 335–344., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579412000028>.

Saint, B. (2019) Why celebrity endorsements are still essential to charities | nfpResearch, NFP Research., Available at: <https://nfpresearch.com/blog/why-celebrity-endorsements-are-still-essential-charities>, (Accessed: 28 May 2025).

Salonen, A. S. (2016) 'Locating Religion in the Context of Charitable Food Assistance: An Ethnographic Study of Food Banks in a Finnish City', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 31(1), pp. 35–50., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2016.1109869>.

Sandelowski, M. (1995) 'Sample size in qualitative research', *Research in Nursing & Health*, 18(2), pp. 179–183., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.4770180211>.

Sandford, R. (2019) 'Thinking with heritage: Past and present in lived futures', *Futures*, 111, pp. 71–80., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2019.06.004>.

Santos, M. E. and Alkire, S. (2011) 'Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)'

Saunders, P. (2003) Can Social Exclusion Provide a New Framework for Measuring Poverty? Working Paper. Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/260>.

Sawyer, A. D. M. et al. (2021) 'Dynamics of the complex food environment underlying dietary intake in low-income groups: a systems map of associations extracted from a systematic umbrella literature review', *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 18(1), p. 96., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-021-01164-1>.

Schoch, K. (2020) 'Case Study Research', Available at: [https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-assets/105275\\_book\\_item\\_105275.pdf](https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-assets/105275_book_item_105275.pdf), (Accessed: 25 November 2023).

Schofield, B. (2025) '*Life for our community is a living hell after court ruling*', *BBC News*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1e6l89wyewo> (Accessed: 16 June 2025).

Scott, C., Sutherland, J. and Taylor, A. (2018) 'Affordability of the UK's Eatwell Guide'. The Food Foundation.

Seale, C. (ed.) (2009) *Researching society and culture*. 2. ed., reprinted. London: SAGE.

Shay, J. (2014) 'Moral injury', *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 31(2), pp. 182–191. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036090>.

Sibal, V. (2018) (PDF) FOOD: IDENTITY OF CULTURE AND RELIGION, ResearchGate., Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327621871\\_FOOD\\_IDENTITY\\_OF\\_CULTURE\\_AND\\_RELIGION](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327621871_FOOD_IDENTITY_OF_CULTURE_AND_RELIGION), (Accessed: 16 June 2025).

Silva, P. et al. (2023) 'Nutrition and Food Literacy: Framing the Challenges to Health Communication', *Nutrients*, 15(22), p. 4708., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu15224708>.

Silver, H. (1994) 'Social exclusion and social solidarity: Three paradigms', *International Labour Review*, 133(5/6), p. 531., Available at: <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=9505300186&site=ehost-live>, (Accessed: 1 August 2023).

Simmet, A. and Stroebele-Benschop, N. (2019) 'Creating healthy food pantries by using behavioural economics approaches', *Public Health Nutrition*, 22(12), pp. 2314–2316., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S136898001900079X>.

Simmet, A. et al. (2017) 'The Nutritional Quality of Food Provided from Food Pantries: A Systematic Review of Existing Literature', *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 117(4), pp. 577–588., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2016.08.015>.

Sims-Schouten, W. and Gilbert, P. (2022) 'Revisiting “resilience” in light of racism, “othering” and resistance', *Race & Class*, 64(1), pp. 84–94., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/03063968221093882>.

Slater, J. et al. (2018) 'Food literacy competencies: A conceptual framework for youth transitioning to adulthood', *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 42(5), pp. 547–556., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12471>.

Smith, D. M. and Thompson, C. (2023) *Food deserts and food insecurity in the UK: exploring social inequality*. London ; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group (Routledge focus on environment and sustainability).

Snow, C. R. (2024) 'High quality healthy food should be accessible to everyone - regardless of income'. Available at: [https://media.churchillfellowship.org/documents/Snow\\_C\\_Report\\_Final\\_2019.pdf](https://media.churchillfellowship.org/documents/Snow_C_Report_Final_2019.pdf).

Snyder, C. (2012) 'A Case Study of a Case Study: Analysis of a Robust Qualitative Research Methodology', *Qualitative Report*, 17., Available at: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ974849>, (Accessed: 15 November 2023).

Southwick, S. M. et al. (2014) 'Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: interdisciplinary perspectives', *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 5(1), p. 25338., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v5.25338>.

Spiteri Cornish, L. and Moraes, C. (2015) 'The Impact of Consumer Confusion on Nutrition Literacy and Subsequent Dietary Behavior', *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(5), pp. 558–574., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20800>.

Spurlock, K. (2024) 'Parental engagement with complementary feeding information and their information-seeking behaviours in the United Kingdom'.

Stake, R. E. (2010) *The art of case study research*. Nachdr. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publ.

Stead, M. et al. (2011) 'Why healthy eating is bad for young people's health: Identity, belonging and food', *Social Science & Medicine*, 72(7), pp. 1131–1139., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.12.029>.

Strand, M. (2023) 'Food and Trauma: Anthropologies of Memory and Postmemory', *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 47(2), pp. 466–494., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11013-022-09785-2>.

Sumpter, S. et al. (2025) 'Impact of a Recipe Kit Scheme (BRITE Box) on Cooking and Food-Related Behaviours of Children and Families: Exploring Parental/Carer Views', *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, 38(2), p. e70038., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jhn.70038>.

Sustain (2024) Will Government extend the Household Support Fund? | Sustain., Available at: <https://www.sustainweb.org/news/aug24-household-support-fund/>, (Accessed: 11 May 2025).

Swain, J. and King, B. (2022) 'Using Informal Conversations in Qualitative Research', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, p. 16094069221085056., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221085056>.

Sørensen, K. et al. (2012) 'Health literacy and public health: A systematic review and integration of definitions and models', *BMC Public Health*, 12(1), p. 80., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-12-80>.

Tarasuk, V. and Eakin, J. M. (2005) 'Food assistance through "surplus" food: Insights from an ethnographic study of food bank work', *Agriculture and Human Values*, 22(2), pp. 177–186., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-004-8277-x>.

Tatli, A. and Özbilgin, M. F. (2012) 'An Emic Approach to Intersectional Study of Diversity at Work: A Bourdieuan Framing', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 14(2), pp. 180–200., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00326.x>.

Taylor, N. et al. (2024) 'Towards measuring food insecurity stigma: development and validation of the Food Insecurity Self-stigma Scale and the Food Support Experiences Scale', *BMC Public Health*, 24(1), p. 3349., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-20878-y>.

Teherani, A. et al. (2015) 'Choosing a Qualitative Research Approach', *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*, 7(4), pp. 669–670., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4300/JGME-D-15-00414.1>.

Terragni, L., Arnold, C. D. and Henjum, S. (2020) 'Food Skills and Their Relationship with Food Security and Dietary Diversity Among Asylum Seekers Living in Norway', *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 52(11), pp. 1026–1034., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2020.05.009>.

The Health Foundation (2003) The '5-a-day' campaign, Policy Navigator., Available at: <https://navigator.health.org.uk/theme/5-day-campaign>, (Accessed: 7 February 2025).

The Health Foundation (2024) Relationship between income and health | The Health Foundation, [health.org.uk](https://www.health.org.uk)., Available at: <https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/money-and-resources/income/relationship-between-income-and-health>, (Accessed: 8 May 2025).

The National Archives (2025) Localism Act 2011. Statute Law Database., Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents>, (Accessed: 28 May 2025).

Thomas, H. et al. (2019) 'Complexities in Conceptualizing and Measuring Food Literacy', *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 119(4), pp. 563–573., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2018.10.015>.

Thomas, H. M. and Irwin, J. D. (2011) 'Cook It Up! A community-based cooking program for at-risk youth: overview of a food literacy intervention', *BMC Research Notes*, 4(1), p. 495., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1756-0500-4-495>.

Thompson, C., Smith, D. and Cummins, S. (2018) 'Understanding the health and wellbeing challenges of the food banking system: A qualitative study of food bank users, providers and referrers in London', *Social science & medicine* (1982), 211(Journal Article), pp. 95–101., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.05.030>.

Truman, E. and Elliott, C. (2019) 'Barriers to Food Literacy: A Conceptual Model to Explore Factors Inhibiting Proficiency', *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 51(1), pp. 107–111., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2018.08.008>.

Truman, E., Lane, D. and Elliott, C. (2017) 'Defining food literacy: A scoping review', *Appetite*, 116, pp. 365–371., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2017.05.007>.

Trussell.org.uk (2025) End of year food bank stats | Trussell, [Trussell.org.uk](https://www.trussell.org.uk)., Available at: <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/latest-stats/end-of-year-stats>, (Accessed: 13 August 2025).

United Nations (2018) Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom, by Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, OHCHR., Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2018/11/statement-visit-united-kingdom-professor-philip-alston-united-nations-special>, (Accessed: 24 August 2023).

United Nations (2023) THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development, United Nations., Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>, (Accessed: 24 August 2023).

United Nations (2025) About the right to food and human rights, OHCHR., Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-food/about-right-food-and-human-rights>, (Accessed: 20 June 2025).

University of Edinburgh (2025) Inside the box: an analysis of the UK's emergency food distribution scheme | Global Agriculture and Food Systems, The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies., Available at: <https://vet.ed.ac.uk/global-agriculture-food-systems/gaafs-news/blogs/inside-the-box-an-analysis-of-the-uk-s-emergency-f>, (Accessed: 21 July 2025).

University of Nottingham (2025) Understanding Pragmatic Research., Available at: [https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/helmopen/rlos/research-evidence-based-practice/designing-research/types-of-study/understanding-pragmatic-research/section05.html?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/helmopen/rlos/research-evidence-based-practice/designing-research/types-of-study/understanding-pragmatic-research/section05.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com), (Accessed: 19 August 2025).

Vadivel, B. et al. (2023) 'The Impact of Low Socioeconomic Background on a Child's Educational Achievements', *Education Research International*, 2023(1), p. 6565088., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/6565088>.

Varela, E. G., Zeldman, J. and Mobley, A. R. (2022) 'Community Stakeholders' Perceptions on Barriers and Facilitators to Food Security of Families with Children under Three Years before and during COVID-19', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(17), p. 10642., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191710642>.

Velardo, S. (2015) 'The Nuances of Health Literacy, Nutrition Literacy, and Food Literacy', *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 47(4), pp. 385-389.e1., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2015.04.328>.

Vidgen, H. A. and Gallegos, D. (2014) 'Defining food literacy and its components', *Appetite*, 76, pp. 50–59., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2014.01.010>.

Vos, M., Deforche, B. and Van Lippevelde, W. (2024) 'Home-delivered meal boxes in a family setting: a qualitative study investigating reasons for use and perceived impact on meal practices', *BMC Public Health*, 24(1), p. 277., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-17729-1>.

Wadhwa, D. and Capaldi-Phillips, E. D. (2014) 'A review of visual cues associated with food on food acceptance and consumption', *Eating Behaviors*, 15(1), pp. 132–143., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2013.11.003>.

Walker, R. (2019) 'Multidimensional poverty: Whose poverty is it?', in *Routledge International Handbook of Poverty*. Routledge.

Walker, C. *et al.* (2024) 'Reclaiming Dignity in Food Support: Addressing the Hidden Cost of Hunger – Independent Food Aid Network'. Available at: <https://foodaidnetwork.org.uk/> (Accessed: 18 August 2025).

Walker, C. *et al.* (2025) 'Managing hunger trauma in community food support- Systemic betrayal, moral injury and distress in staff and volunteers'. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/660a812fd1985f13334416c2/t/67bd97402181e720960eaad9/1740478276594/Managing+hunger+trauma+in+community+food+support+Systemic+betrayal%2C+moral+injury+and+distress+in+staff+and+volunteers.pdf>.

West Sussex County Council (2025) Household Support Fund, West Sussex County Council., Available at: <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/leisure-recreation-and-community/household-support-fund/>, (Accessed: 11 May 2025).

West, E. G. *et al.* (2020) 'The Role of a Food Literacy Intervention in Promoting Food Security and Food Literacy—OzHarvest's NEST Program', *Nutrients*, 12(8), p. 2197., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12082197>.

Wijayaratne, S. P. *et al.* (2018) 'Food literacy, healthy eating barriers and household diet', *European Journal of Marketing*, 52(12), pp. 2449–2477., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-10-2017-0760>.

Wolfson, J. A. *et al.* (2017) 'A comprehensive approach to understanding cooking behavior: Implications for research and practice', *British Food Journal*, 119(5), pp. 1147–1158., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-09-2016-0438>.

Wrieden, W.L. *et al.* (2007) 'The impact of a community-based food skills intervention on cooking confidence, food preparation methods and dietary choices – an exploratory trial', *Public health nutrition*, 10(2), pp. 203–211. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980007246658>.

Yates, L. and Warde, A. (2015) 'The evolving content of meals in Great Britain. Results of a survey in 2012 in comparison with the 1950s', *Appetite*, 84, pp. 299–308., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2014.10.017>.

Yau, A. *et al.* (2021) 'Newspaper coverage of food insecurity in UK, 2016–2019: a multi-method analysis', *BMC Public Health*, 21, p. 1201., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11214-9>.

Yin, R. K. (2014) *Case study research: design and methods*. Fifth edition. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Young, I. M. (2002) *Inclusion and democracy*. Oxford [United Kingdom]: New York : Oxford University Press.

Zack, R. M. et al. (2022) 'Facilitators and Barriers to Patient Attendance at a Free Health Center Produce Market', *American journal of preventive medicine*, 63(3 Suppl 2), pp. S131–S143., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2022.03.034>.

Zellner, D. A. et al. (2014) 'It tastes as good as it looks! The effect of food presentation on liking for the flavor of food', *Appetite*, 77, pp. 31–35., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2014.02.009>.

Ziauddeen, N. et al. (2025) 'A mixed methods study exploring food insecurity and diet quality in households accessing food clubs in England'. *medRxiv*, p. 2024.12.03.24318378., Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2024.12.03.24318378>.

# Appendices

<a href="#"><u>Appendix A Integrative overview of the factors of food literacy</u></a> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix B PRISMA process for literature relating to adult cookery interventions</u></a>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix C Search terms for Prisma Literature Search</u></a> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix D Review of literature relating to adult cookery interventions</u></a> ...	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix E Thematic Map – Intrinsic Factors</u></a> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix F Thematic Map - Heuristic factors</u></a> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix G Thematic Map – Extrinsic Factors</u></a> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix H Thematic Map – Extended Food Aid Interventions</u></a> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix I Question Guides and Prompts for Stakeholders</u></a> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix J Question Guides and Prompts for Beneficiaries</u></a> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix K Sample Participant Information Sheet</u></a> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix L Sample Participant Consent Form</u></a> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix M : The nature of EFAI settings or the role of unaffiliated individuals and justification for inclusion</u></a> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix N: Participants within the research sample</u></a> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix O Example of Post Visit Observation Notes (Anonymised)</u></a> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix P Samples of Inductive and Deductive Coding Using NVivo (Anonymised)</u></a> .	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<a href="#"><u>Appendix Q Samples of Inductive and Deductive Coding Using NVivo (Anonymised)</u></a>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

## Appendix A Integrative overview of the factors of food literacy








		Factors beyond skills and knowledge							
		Skills	Knowledge	Self – Efficacy & Confidence	Food Decisions	Food Systems	Education	Culture	Other
Authors	Thomas et al. (2019)								
	Truman and Elliot (2018)				i	ii		iii	
	Vidgen and Gallegos (2014)								
	Perry et al. (2017)			iv					
	Block et al. (2011)			v					vi
	Bublitz (2011)								
	Cullen et al. (2015)					vii		viii	ix
	Krause et al. (2018)					x			
	Lawlis et al. (2019)								
	Palumbo (2015)								
	Slater et al. (2018)					xi			xi
	Desjardin and Azervedo (2013)*								xii

- I. Healthy food choices
- II. Understanding broader food systems
- III. The societal aspects of food
- IV. The individual's belief to carry out tasks and use skills
- V. Heuristics, e.g. Problem Solving
- VI. Campaigns
- VII. Access and Availability
- VIII. Values and beliefs

Notes: As described by the authors:

- ix. Programmes
- x. Critically reflecting on factors that influence food choice and understanding the impact of those on society
- xi. Understanding social justice, environmental and food corporate issues
- xii. Positive relationships with food, enjoyment, and secondary benefits
- xiii. Satisfaction, creativity, social connections

## Appendix B PRISMA process for literature relating to adult cookery interventions

IDENTIFICATION	Total records identified through database screening (SCOPUS, PubMed, Google Scholar). (n =205)  Date parameters: 2000 onwards		
		Excluded duplicates (n=108)	
	Records after duplicates removed (n=97)		
			Additional Records Identified through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reference lists (n=6)</li> <li>• Database recommendations (n=4)</li> </ul>
SCREENING	Records Screened (n=107)		Records excluded after title and abstract screening. (n=65)
ELIGIBILITY			
	Full text publications assessed for eligibility. (n=42)		Full text publications excluded (n=30) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not assessing interventions (n=19)</li> <li>• Conceptual (n=2)</li> <li>• Interventions non participatory (n=3)</li> <li>• Not focussed on domestic setting (n=1)</li> <li>• No inclusion of cookery skills element (n=1)</li> <li>• Proposal of design /recommending/not evaluating (n=4)</li> </ul>
INCLUDED			
	Total studies included. (n=12)		

### Appendix C Search terms for Prisma Literature Search

Concept 1	Concept 2	Concept 3	Concept 4
Attendees	Cookery classes	Effectiveness	Poverty
Beneficiaries	Cookery	Efficacy	Food Poverty
Young Parents	Cooking	Outcomes	Food Insecurity
Community	Cooking instruction	Impact	Food Vulnerability
Stakeholders	Food Literacy	Results	
Adults		Relief	
		Effects	

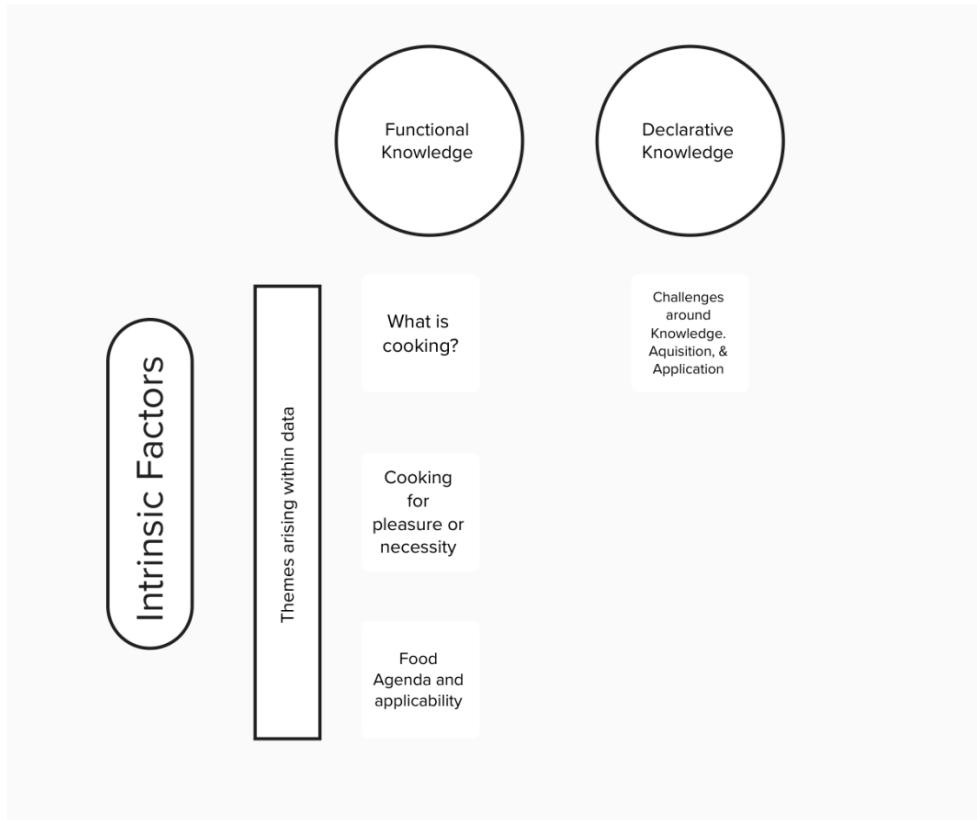
### Appendix D Review of literature relating to adult cookery interventions

	Author(s)	Year	Country	Intervention length (weeks)	Target	Study Design	Number of Subjects Completing	Attrition (T1 – T2/T3)	Control Group Used	Key Findings
1	Begley et al.	2019	Australia	4	Food Literacy and dietary behaviours	Quantitative	1092	41%	NO	Useful for very low literacy levels : Tend to attract existing cooks
2	Flego et al.	2014	Australia	10	Cooking confidence and cooking/eating behaviours	Quantitative	T1- 694 T2- 383 T3 – 214 (6 months)	69.2%	YES	Improved confidence and FL skills sustained after 6 months

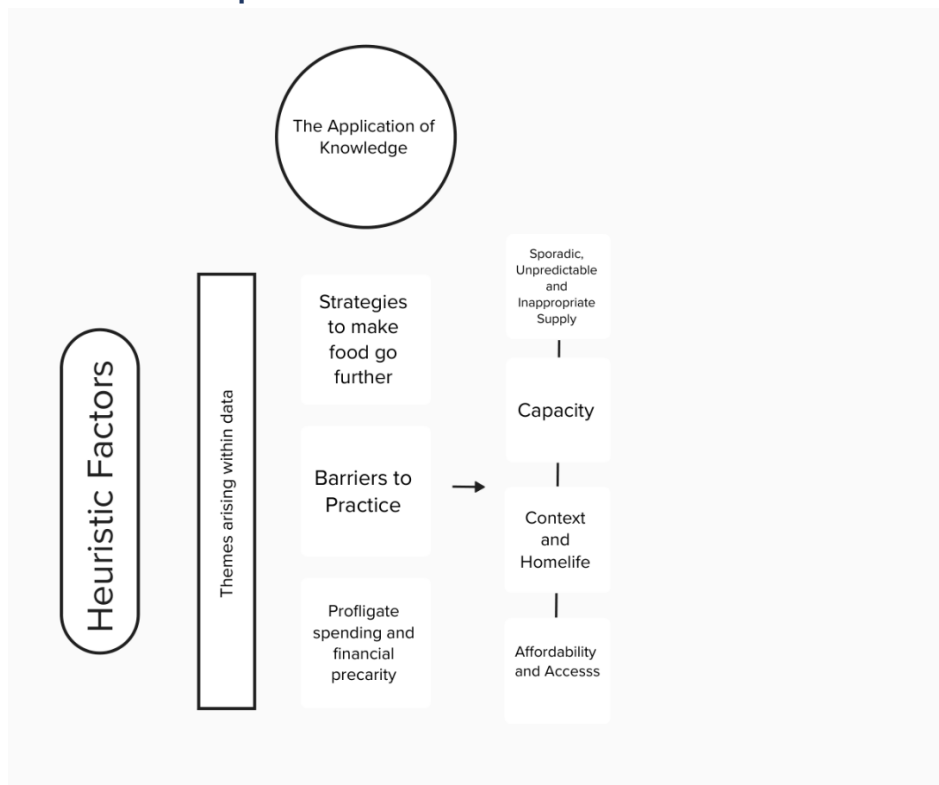
3	Garcia et al.	2017	UK	6	Cooking Confidence, Skills & Nutrition	Quantitative	T1 - 117 T2 - 62	47%	NO	Improved motivation only
5	Matias et al.	2021	USA	14	Nutrition and cooking skills for college students	Quantitative	T1 - 214 T2 - 171	20.1%	NO	Some efficacy acknowledged selection bias.
6	Overcash et al.	2018	USA	6	Parental cooking confidence, food prep/resource management, vegetable liking and uptake.	Quantitative	T1 / T2- 89 NB 1 week after intervention	Not Known	NO	Self-selection bias. Overall, a lack of significant findings
7	Pooler et al.	2017	USA	6	Food resource management self confidence	Quantitative	T1 -831 T2 322 (6m)	40%	YES (n = 856)  6m = 335 (A = 60.8%)	Study acknowledged as vulnerable to validity threats. Selection bias influence outcomes
8	Wrieden et al.	2007	UK	7	Dietary intake, food prep, cooking confidence.	Quantitative	T1 -113 T2- T3- 63 (6m)	44.2%	YES	Small but positive influence on behaviour – flexible interventions required
9	Garcia et al.	2021	USA	3 Classes	Develop and implement a community-tailored cooking programme. Cooking	Mixed methods	T1- 45	N/A	NO	Difficult to identify if repeat attendance occurred. High baseline skillset

					confidence / Waste					No follow up period	
10	Hutchinson et al.	2016	UK	8	Cooking skills and simple nutritional messaging	Mixed Methods	T1/T2- 795 T3- 462 (6 months)  Qual analysis. - 40	41.9%	NO	Increased confidence No association with increased nutrition	
11	Orr and McCamley	2017	UK	6	Nutrition Knowledge, Cooking confidence	Mixed Methods	T1 - 69 T2 -22 T3  Qual – 22 (14 @ 3months / 8 @ 6 months / 12 @ 12 months)	68.1%	NO	Increased awareness: not reflected in behaviour	
12	West et al.	2020	Australia	6	Promoting food security and food literacy	Mixed Methods	T1- 56 T2 – 21  Post programme Interview – 17	62.5%	NO	Inconsistent outcomes	
13	Garcia et al.	2016	Systematic review								Some positive impacts but consistency in study design, delivery and evaluation warranted to establish clearer conclusions

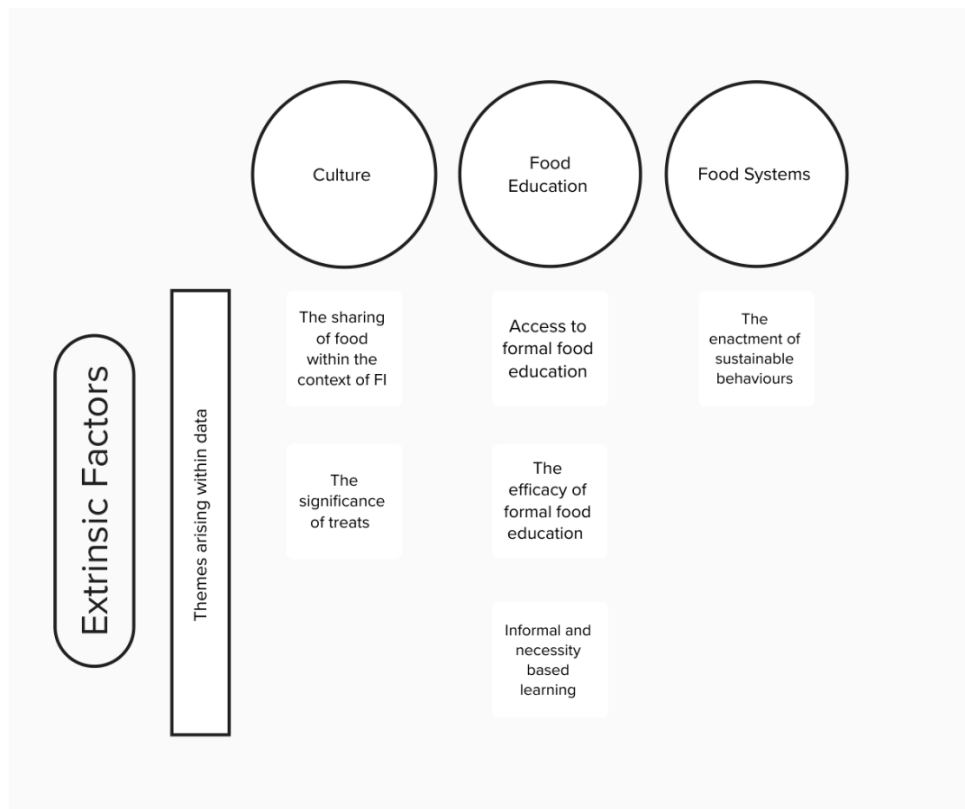
## Appendix E Thematic Map – Intrinsic Factors



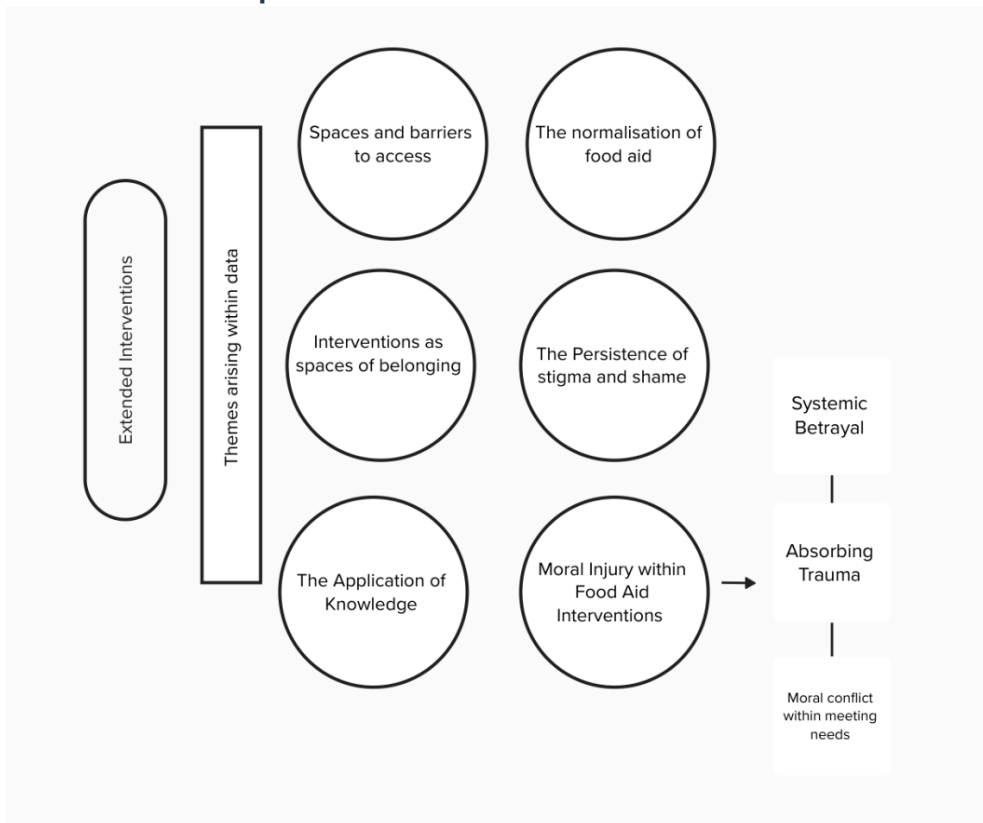
## Appendix F Thematic Map - Heuristic factors



## Appendix G Thematic Map – Extrinsic Factors



## Appendix H Thematic Map – Extended Food Aid Interventions



## Appendix I Question Guides and Prompts for Stakeholders

### Questions for Commissioners / Partner Agencies

#### Key objective:

**To investigate how the variety of engaged stakeholders (including funders, commissioners, delivery partners, and end beneficiaries) perceive food literacy programmes to be effective in mitigating experiences of food insecurity in the UK.**

**Working definition of food insecurity for purposes of this investigation:** *“The inability to consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to so.”*

**Working Definition of Food Literacy for the purposes of this investigation:** “A collection of interrelated knowledge, skills and behaviours that are required to plan, manage, select, prepare, and eat foods that meet needs.”

**Background and organizations involved:** This investigation is part of a wider project aiming to optimize redistribution of food waste through a collaboration between the charity, FareShare, and the University of Hertfordshire.

#### 1. Initial stages:

- a) As participants arrive / at the start of the phone or Teams call – welcome them by name, provide light refreshments if face-to-face (hot beverage/water / biscuits).
- b) Obtain written consent; if a remote interview, check that this has been received by post or email and confirm that the participant has signed.
- c) Start proceedings by introducing yourself.
- d) Introduce the research (background, organisations involved as above), purpose of the interview, plans for data analysis and reporting.
- e) Explain the aim as exploring the effectiveness of interventions targeting food literacy (planning & budgeting, shopping, cooking, and nutrition) at mitigating the impacts of food insecurity.
- f) Establish ground rules: confidentiality (so no names or identifiable characteristics), all viewpoints welcomed, and if the conversation drifts off topic, it will bring the conversation back to focus.

#### 2. Start recording:

#### 3. Introductory topics:

- a) Invite participant to introduce him/herself and experience of FI /FL or interest in this area.
- b) Establish what the interviewees role / capacity is with regard to commissioning, design, or delivery of FL interventions.
- c) Clarify what this experience is and approximate time frame, i.e. is this very recent or in last 2-3 years or longer? And for roughly how long?
- d) Identify any specific groups of people that they may have specific experience of / with, i.e. to find out what might drive their responses and to ensure we cover a range of groups.

#### **4. Main body topics:**

Clarify that we are interested in how FL **may or may not** improve the experiences of FI. **Reiterate that FL is concerned with ALL areas of food provision within the home.**

#### **Thinking about Food Literacy ....**

- How would you describe food literacy?
- What prompted your / your organization's involvement in the intervention?
- How does improving food literacy support your organizational objectives?
- Could you describe your / your organization's role in supporting FL / FI
- How was the course / intervention designed (may include prompts about consultation / past experience / Pilots etc.)

#### **FOR COMMISSIONERS**

- How were delivery partners recruited / selected (if appropriate)
- How do you measure impact / success?
- Were there any particular barriers / enablers / motivators around engagement?

#### **FOR DELIVERY PARTNERS**

- Could you tell me about the nature of the programme that was delivered? (Course length (session times and number of sessions, delivery model, numbers attending)
- How were participants recruited?
- How do you measure impact / success?
  - Was this a requirement of funding or part of your own organization?
  - Were there any particular barriers / enablers around engagement?

#### **Thinking about after the intervention delivery**

- How successful (or not) would you say the intervention has been in achieving its intended objectives?
- How has this been measured?

- Will your organization be continuing / repeating the intervention?
- If YES – Will you be making any changes?
- If NO – Why Not? What do you think might make it more appropriate/ successful / what modifications might support?
- Were there any unexpected outcomes for you / your organization?

**5. Move discussion towards ending:**

When this project concludes, we hope to be better able to direct resources towards people at risk of FI. Are there any other brief points they would like to make about addressing FL / FI.

**6. Final stages**

Concluding remarks and thank-you

## Appendix J Question Guides and Prompts for Beneficiaries

### Questions for Beneficiaries / Intervention attendees

#### Key objective:

To investigate how the variety of engaged stakeholders (including funders, commissioners, delivery partners, and end beneficiaries) perceive food literacy programmes to be effective in mitigating experiences of food vulnerability in the UK.

**Working definition of food insecurity for purposes of this investigation:** *“The inability to consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to so.”*

**Working Definition of Food Literacy for the purposes of this investigation:** *“A collection of interrelated knowledge, skills and behaviours that are required to plan, manage, select, prepare, and eat foods that meet needs.”*

**Background and organisations involved:** This investigation is part of a wider project aiming to optimise the redistribution of food waste through a collaboration between the charity, FareShare, and the University of Hertfordshire.

#### 7. Initial stages:

- g) As participants arrive / at the start of the phone call, welcome them by name. Provide light refreshments if face-to-face (hot beverage / water / biscuits).
- h) Obtain written consent; if a telephone interview, check this has been received by post or email and confirm that the participant has signed.
- i) Start proceedings by introducing self.
- j) Introduce the research (background, organisations involved as above), purpose of the interview, plans for data analysis and reporting.
- k) Explain the aim as exploring the effectiveness of interventions targeting food literacy (planning & budgeting, shopping, cooking, and nutrition) at mitigating the impacts of food vulnerability.
- l) Establish ground rules: confidentiality (so no names or identifiable characteristics), all viewpoints welcomed, if drift off topic will bring conversation back to focus.

#### 8. Start recording:

#### 9. Introductory topics:

- e) Invite participant to introduce him/herself and experience of FI or interest in this area.
- f) Establish if participant has personal experience of FI or experience through their work.
- g) Clarify what this experience is and approximate time frame, i.e. is this very recent or in last 2-3 years or longer? And for roughly how long?
- h) Identify any specific groups of people that they may have specific experience of / with, i.e. to find out what might drive their responses and to ensure we cover a range of groups.

### **10. Main body topics:**

Clarify that we are interested in how FL may or may not improve the experiences of FI.  
**Reiterate that FL is concerned with ALL areas of food provision within the home.**

#### **Thinking about before the course / intervention ....**

- How would you describe your level of food literacy?
- How did you find out about the course?
- What attracted you to the course / intervention?
- What were your expectations / what were you hoping to get out of the course / intervention?

#### **Thinking about the course itself (if applicable)....**

- Could you tell me about the nature of the programme that you attended? (Course length (session times and number of sessions, delivery model, numbers attending)
- Was the course what you expected it to be? If not – why not?
- Would you say that the course didn't meet / met or exceeded your expectations?
- What was the best part of the course?
- What wasn't so good?
- Could anything have made the course better / more useful?

#### **Thinking about after the course (if applicable)...**

- Would you say that your level of FL has changed?
  - If Yes - In what ways?
  - If No – Why do you think that is? (Prompts may include asking about obstacles and barriers to implementing learning or reflecting on pre-course knowledge)
- Could you describe how the course has impacted upon your experiences of FI

**11. Move discussion towards ending:**

When this project concludes, we hope to be better able to direct resources towards people at risk of FI. Are there any other brief points they would like to make about addressing FL / FI.

**12. Final stages**

Concluding remarks and thank-you

## Appendix K Sample Participant Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

### ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS (‘ETHICS COMMITTEE’)

#### FORM EC6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

**1 Title of study**

*An investigation into the relationship between food literacy and food vulnerability.*

**2 Introduction**

You are being invited to take part in a study. Before you decide whether to do so, it is important that you understand the study that is being undertaken and what your involvement will include. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask us anything that is not clear or for any further information you would like to help you make your decision. Please do take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. The University’s regulation, UPR RE01, 'Studies Involving the Use of Human Participants' can be accessed via this link:

<https://www.herts.ac.uk/about-us/governance/university-policies-and-regulations-uprs/uprs>

(after accessing this website, scroll down to Letter S where you will find the regulation)

Thank you for reading this.

**3 What is the purpose of this study?**

To investigate how the variety of engaged stakeholders (including funders, commissioners, delivery partners, and end beneficiaries) perceive food literacy programmes to be effective in mitigating experiences of food vulnerability in the UK.

**4 Do I have to take part?**

It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. Agreeing to join the study does not mean that you have to complete it. You are free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part at all, will not affect any treatment/care that you may receive (should this be relevant).

**5 Are there any age or other restrictions that may prevent me from participating?**

*This study is concerned only with adults and main food providers in the home over 18 years of age. Anyone under 18 years old will not be eligible for participation.*

**6 How long will my part in the study take?**

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be involved in it for *the duration of a semi structured interview (anticipated time of 30 – 45 minutes)*

**7 What will happen to me if I take part?**

The first thing to happen will be *a one-to-one interview with open questions conducted either face to face, by telephone or on MS Teams.*

**8 What are the possible disadvantages, risks or side effects of taking part?**

(Note: if appropriate for this particular study, you will be asked to agree to any required health screening questionnaire in advance of the study. Please also note that circumstances may arise that could result in the need for you to withdraw from the study; should such circumstances occur, the investigator will discuss the matter with you.)

*There are no anticipated disadvantages, risks, or side effects of taking part.*

**9 What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

**There are no anticipated personal benefits of taking part. Information provided will be collated with others and contribute towards the understanding of how the causes, effects and solutions to food vulnerability may be improved upon.**

**10 What will happen to the data collected within this study?**

- The collated data collected will be stored electronically, in a password-protected environment, for 24 months, after which time it will be destroyed under secure conditions.
- The data will be anonymised prior to storage.

**11 Will the data be required for use in further studies?**

- The data collected may be re-used or subjected to further analysis as part of a future ethically-approved study; the data to be re-used will be anonymised.
- The results of the study and/or the data collected (in anonymised form) may be deposited in an open access repository.

**12 Who has reviewed this study?**

This study has been reviewed by:  
<Please delete whichever does not apply:>

- The University of Hertfordshire Health, Science, Engineering and Technology Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority
- or**
- The University of Hertfordshire Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority

The UH protocol number is *<enter>*

**13 Factors that might put others at risk.**

Please note that if, during the study, any medical conditions or non-medical circumstances such as unlawful activity become apparent that might or had put others at risk, the University may refer the matter to the appropriate authorities and, under such circumstances, you will be withdrawn from the study.

**14 Who can I contact if I have any questions?**

If you would like further information or would like to discuss any details personally, please get in touch with me, in writing, by phone or by email: *<Applicant: please enter details here>*

**Although we hope it is not the case, if you have any complaints or concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please write to the University's Secretary and Registrar at the following address:**

Secretary and Registrar  
University of Hertfordshire  
College Lane  
Hatfield  
Herts  
AL10 9AB

**Thank you very much for reading this information and giving consideration to taking part in this study.**

## Appendix L Sample Participant Consent Form

### UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS (‘ETHICS COMMITTEE’)

#### FORM EC3 CONSENT FORM FOR STUDIES INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

I, the undersigned [*please give your name here, in BLOCK CAPITALS*]

.....  
of [*please give contact details here, sufficient to enable the investigator to get in touch with you, such as a postal or email address*]

.....  
hereby freely agree to take part in the study entitled

*“An investigation into the relationship between food literacy and food insecurity.”*

(UH Protocol number BUS/PGR/UH/05993.....)

**1** I confirm that I have been given a Participant Information Sheet (a copy of which is attached to this form) giving particulars of the study, including its aim(s), methods and design, the names and contact details of key people and, as appropriate, the risks and potential benefits, how the information collected will be stored and for how long, and any plans for follow-up studies that might involve further approaches to participants. I have also been informed of how my personal information on this form will be stored and for how long. I have been given details of my involvement in the study. I have been told that in the event of any significant change to the aim(s) or design of the study I will be informed and asked to renew my consent to participate in it.

**2** I have been assured that I may withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage or having to give a reason.

**3** In giving my consent to participate in this study, I understand that voice, video or photo-recording will take place and I have been informed of how/whether this recording will be transmitted/displayed.

**4** I have been told how information relating to me (data obtained in the course of the study, and data provided by me about myself) will be handled: how it will be kept secure, who will have access to it, and how it will or may be used, including the possibility of anonymised data being deposited in a repository with open access (freely available).

**5** I understand that if there is any revelation of unlawful activity or any indication of non-medical circumstances that would or has put others at risk, the University may refer the matter to the appropriate authorities.

**6** I have been told that I may at some time in the future be contacted again in connection with this or another study.

Signature of participant.....Date.....

Signature of (principal) investigator.....Date.....

Name of (principal) investigator [*in BLOCK CAPITALS please*]

JAMES SHEPHERD

### Appendix M : The nature of EFAI settings or the role of unaffiliated individuals and justification for inclusion

Setting Number	Total Participants	Region	EFAI Outputs	Type of Organisation	Geography	Justification for inclusion
1	1	South East England	Lived Experience campaigner	Individual	Town	Lived experience of accessing food aid interventions but unaffiliated to single setting
2	1	Scotland	Food Pantry, Community Meals	Non- Denom Hyper Local Charity	City	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
3	10	East of England	Food Pantry, Cookery Classes, Community Café	Faith Based Hyper Local Charity	Small Town	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
4	1	Wales & South West England	Food Bank, Food Pantry, Community Café	Non- Denom Hyper Local Charity	Town	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
5	3	North East	Food Pantry, Cookery Classes, Community Café	Non- Denom Hyper Local Charity	Town	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
6	5	Wales & South West England	Reuse food market, Cookery Classes, Community Café	Non- Denom Hyper Local Charity	City	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
7	3	Wales & South West England	Food Bank, Cookery Classes, Community Café	Non- Denom Hyper Local Charity	Town	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
8	3	Midlands	Community Café,	Non- Denom Hyper Local Charity	City	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
9	2	East of England	Food Pantry, Community Café,	Faith Based Hyper Local Charity	City	Fits within the definition of extended food aid

			Cookery Classes			interventions or support of FI
10	1	East of England	Community Café, Food Pantry	Faith Based Hyper Local Charity	City	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
11	1	North West	Food Pantry, Signposting Advice Services	Faith Based Hyper Local Charity	City	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
12	7	North West	Food Pantry, Cookery Classes	Non- Denom Hyper Local Charity	City	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
13	1	East of England	Cookery Classes and Food Led community support	Local Authority	Regional	Commissioning of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
14	1	North West	Food Pantry, Community Café, Cookery Classes	Non- Denom Hyper Local Charity	City	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of
15	3	East of England	Commissions food aid and behaviour change projects	Local Authority	Regional	Commissioning of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
16	1	East of England	Food Pantry, Community Café, Cookery Classes	Local Authority	Town	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
17	3	East of England	Food Pantry, Community Café, Cookery Classes	Local Authority	Town	Lived experience of accessing food aid interventions
18	1	East of England	Commissions food aid and behaviour change projects	Local Authority	Regional	Commissioning of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
19	3	East of England	Foodbank, Food Pantry	Non- Denom Hyper Local Charity	Small Town	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
20	1	East of England	Social Supermarket, Advice services,	Non-Denom Local Charity	City	Fits within the definition of extended food aid

						interventions or support of FI
21	4	Wales & South West England	Food Pantry, Community Café, Cookery Classes	Faith Based Hyper Local Charity	Small Town	Fits within the definition of extended food aid interventions or support of FI
22	1	National	Food Aid Charity Governance and Oversight	National Charity	Regional	Strategic oversight of extended food aid interventions or support of FI

#### Appendix N: Participants within the research sample

Participant Number	Setting Number	Gender	Age Range	Stakeholder Function / Beneficiary	Lived Experience of FI	Interview Number	Focus Group Number	Conversation Number
1	1	M	Young Adult (18 - 30)	Beneficiary	Yes	1		
2	2	M	Adult ( 31- 59)	Service Delivery	No	2		
3	3	F	Young Adult (18 - 30)	Beneficiary	Yes			1
4	3	F	Young Adult (18 - 30)	Beneficiary	Yes			1
5	3	F	Young Adult (18 - 30)	Beneficiary	Yes			2
6	3	F	Adult ( 31- 59)	Beneficiary	Yes			2
7	3	F	Adult ( 31- 59)	Beneficiary	No	3		
8	3	F	Older Adult (60+)	Beneficiary	Yes			3
9	3	F	Older Adult (60+)	Beneficiary	Yes			3
10	3	F	Older Adult (60+)	Beneficiary	Yes			3
11	3	F	Older Adult (60+)	Beneficiary	Yes			3
12	3	F	Young Adult (18 - 30)	Service Delivery	Yes	4		
13	4	M	Older Adult (60+)	Service Delivery	No	5		
14	5	F	Adult ( 31- 59)	Service Delivery	No	6		
15	5	F	Older Adult (60+)	Service Delivery	Yes	7		
16	5	F	Adult ( 31- 59)	Service Delivery	No	8		
17	6	F	Adult ( 31- 59)	Service Delivery	No	9		

18	6	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No	10		
19	6	M	Adult ( 31-59)	Beneficiary	No	11		
20	6	M	Older Adult (60+)	Beneficiary	Yes	12		
21	6	F	Older Adult (60+)	Beneficiary	No	13		
22	7	M	Older Adult (60+)	Service Delivery	No		1	
23	7	F	Young Adult (18 - 30)	Service Delivery	No		1	
24	7	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No		1	
25	8	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No	14		
26	8	F	Young Adult (18 - 30)	Service Delivery	Yes	15		
27	8	F	Older Adult (60+)	Service Delivery	Yes	16		
28	9	M	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No		2	
29	9	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No		2	
30	10	F	Older Adult (60+)	Service Delivery	No			
31	11	M	Young Adult (18 - 30)	Service Delivery	No	17		
32	12	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No	18		
33	12	M	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	Yes		3	
34	12	M	Young Adult (18 - 30)	Beneficiary	Yes		3	
35	12	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Beneficiary	Yes		3	
36	12	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Beneficiary	Yes		3	
37	12	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Beneficiary	Yes		3	
38	12	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Beneficiary	Yes		3	
39	13	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Commissioning & Funding	No	19		
40	14	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No	20		
41	15	M	Adult ( 31-59)	Policy Development	No		4	
42	15	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No		4	
43	15	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Commissioning & Funding	No		4	
44	16	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No	21		

45	17	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Beneficiary	Yes	22		
46	17	F	Older Adult (60+)	Beneficiary	Yes	23		
47	17	M	Older Adult (60+)	Beneficiary	Yes	24		
48	18	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Commissioning & Funding	No	25		
49	19	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No			4
50	19	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No			4
51	19	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No			4
52	20	M	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No	26		
53	20	F	Young Adult (18 - 30)	Service Delivery	No	27		
54	21	M	Older Adult (60+)	Service Delivery	No	28		
55	21	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No	29		
56	21	M	Young Adult (18 - 30)	Service Delivery	Yes	30		
57	21	M	Adult ( 31-59)	Beneficiary	Yes	31		
58	22	F	Adult ( 31-59)	Service Delivery	No	32		

## Appendix O Example of Post Visit Observation Notes (Anonymised)

Observation notes – Visit 10<sup>th</sup> August 2023.

The food pantry is located within the main building, itself situated opposite a public library and adjacent to a precinct of shops (many closed/boarded up).

Buildings are functional / post-war concrete ... very little green / natural.

\*\*\*\*\* are situated within what appears to be a prefab / flat-roof single-story space.

When we arrive, we are told that the skylight to the building had been damaged following an attempted break-in.

The space as you walk in is devoted to (retail of) craft-type resources and is reminiscent. It is very full with little room for people to move around comfortably (there were five people plus an assistant on the till). Adjacent to this space is a 'classroom' with a craft-based activity attended by mainly over-65s (possibly older). Two older women from this group are selecting items from the 'shop' as part of the project being conducted that day. It is unclear how this works as a food pantry.

We are shown the food pantry, which is adjacent to the main shop space. It is clean and well organised with two glass-fronted fridge freezers, wooden racking with tinned and dry goods and a table with fresh fruit and vegetables. There are household and personal hygiene products. There are tins of 'beef consommé' on the 'need to go shelf'. The freezer has ready-made chips and gravy, ready meals. Could indicate what is wanted vs what is

available. We are told that members prefer this. There is a food bank down the road, but people don't want to be seen or see people they know, because people talk

There are also spaces for CAB and podiatrists.

There is a regular but not massive level of footfall., Members pay a weekly fee, which entitles them to a set number of items from the pantry. Items are rung through the till to create a retail experience and give a retail value to the products chosen. We are told how some members find it frustrating that some people have higher value baskets than others and that this is somehow unfair, but they always explain that it is based on what they choose.

Apart from one older man (70 – 75 +) all staff and members are female. There is a clear sense of camaraderie and community. At one stage, an older woman (recently bereaved?) is upset and comforted by others.

The café from which the cookery classes are to be run is in another venue, in the shopping precinct.

It is yet to open, and we are told that a lot of work is needed to get it clean. A lot of emphasis was placed on this throughout the conversations.

The café space is well presented, looks professional and attractive, and feels like many other cafes (not a community or municipal feel). Two- or three-members pop in while we are there to ask when the opening will be. There is a sense of anticipation.

We discuss some elements of being commercial ... there will be a need to turnover money quickly to maintain liquidity and pay rent/bills etc. The hope is that they will attract from further afield and not wholly rely on local footfall who may not have money to spend. When we return to the main space for interviews, a woman is being supported with completing forms for UC or similar. This is something that happens but they urge that they support rather than do this for people.

There is a sense that the two co-directors very much drive this. They are very involved in every aspect of the project. What would happen if they did not do this?

The co-director augments FareShare supply with shopping from places like B&M, other discount retailers each week... this is a time commitment that needs to be taken into account.

A lot of activities are delivered. International Women's Day, etc, etc. Are these similar types of activities with a different theme, rather than a range of the kinds of activities... e.g. what is the reach?

Does the predominantly craft-based appearance deter?? Do people know what's available?

There is a sense of pride in what they do.

Notable comments “For a lot of people here the mine could have closed yesterday” “For a lot of people this is it, there is an acceptance of how life will be” “nobody asked us if we wanted it (Jamie Oliver)”

## Appendix P Samples of Inductive and Deductive Coding Using NVivo (Anonymised)

Name	Files	References	Created on	Created...	Modified on	Modified by	Color
○ CRITICISM OF FORMAL FOOD EDUCATL...	8	17	3 Nov 2024 at 16:13	JT	5 Dec 2024 at 10:14	JT	
○ FOOD INSECURITY	38	187	17 Jul 2024 at 19:58	JT	20 Nov 2024 at 11:...	JT	
○ Access	21	49	14 Nov 2024 at 18:...	JT	5 Dec 2024 at 13:14	JT	
○ Availability	0	0	14 Nov 2024 at 18:...	JT	20 Nov 2024 at 11:...	JT	
○ Stability	0	0	14 Nov 2024 at 18:...	JT	15 Nov 2024 at 14:...	JT	
○ Utilisation	0	0	14 Nov 2024 at 18:...	JT	15 Nov 2024 at 14:...	JT	
○ FOOD LITERACY	37	221	17 Jul 2024 at 19:59	JT	15 Feb 2025 at 11:24	JT	
○ Extrinsic	3	4	25 Sep 2024 at 18:...	JT	12 Nov 2024 at 16:...	JT	
○ FL Strategies within the context of FI	9	23	3 Nov 2024 at 16:07	JT	18 Nov 2024 at 16:16	JT	
○ Intrinsic	1	2	25 Sep 2024 at 18:...	JT	20 Nov 2024 at 11:...	JT	
○ INTERVENTIONS	46	434	4 Aug 2024 at 11:52	JT	25 Mar 2025 at 11:22	JT	
○ Bricolage and Entrepreneurialism	23	52	30 Jul 2024 at 11:53	JT	5 Dec 2024 at 12:04	JT	
○ FS FL courses	2	9	4 Aug 2024 at 10:58	JT	28 Oct 2024 at 13:...	JT	
○ Intervention	12	29	18 Jul 2024 at 12:38	JT	20 Nov 2024 at 09:...	JT	
○ Sustainability	26	75	18 Jul 2024 at 12:37	JT	13 Mar 2025 at 14:...	JT	
○ What does success look like for proje...	3	3	30 Jul 2024 at 14:17	JT	12 Nov 2024 at 16:...	JT	
○ wider roles	28	65	18 Jul 2024 at 13:51	JT	13 Mar 2025 at 14:...	JT	
○ isolation	11	14	17 Jul 2025 at 11:57	JT	17 Jul 2025 at 12:11	JT	
○ moral outsourcing	2	3	15 Jul 2025 at 16:33	JT	15 Jul 2025 at 16:48	JT	
○ SENTIMENT ANALYSIS	2	4	25 Sep 2024 at 18:...	JT	12 Nov 2024 at 16:...	JT	
○ THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS	48	377	17 Jul 2024 at 19:57	JT	20 Nov 2024 at 10:...	JT	
○ Cultural imperialism	10	19	16 Oct 2024 at 10:07	JT	6 Feb 2025 at 08:38	JT	
○ Ignorance of the context of FI	3	12	5 Dec 2024 at 11:22	JT	5 Dec 2024 at 14:29	JT	
○ Secondary Food System	2	3	5 Dec 2024 at 11:21	JT	5 Dec 2024 at 12:38	JT	
○ Dignity and Shame	4	8	20 Nov 2024 at 13:...	JT	13 Mar 2025 at 12:41	JT	
○ Entitlement	8	14	30 Jul 2024 at 14:33	JT	20 Nov 2024 at 13:...	JT	
○ Gratitude	5	5	12 Aug 2024 at 16:...	JT	15 Nov 2024 at 10:...	JT	
○ new church	5	12	30 Jul 2024 at 13:40	JT	5 Dec 2024 at 14:21	JT	
○ Normalising Food Insecurity	5	5	30 Jul 2024 at 14:09	JT	5 Dec 2024 at 12:13	JT	
○ othering	27	89	18 Jul 2024 at 14:08	JT	5 Dec 2024 at 12:42	JT	
○ Resilience	5	7	19 Aug 2024 at 16:...	JT	20 Nov 2024 at 09:...	JT	
○ Social exclusion theories of poverty	5	7	18 Jul 2024 at 13:57	JT	5 Dec 2024 at 11:49	JT	
○ The abnormal in the normalisation	3	4	4 Aug 2024 at 10:46	JT	29 Oct 2024 at 11:33	JT	

## Appendix Q Samples of Inductive and Deductive Coding Using NVivo (Anonymised)

TRANSCRIPT...  
TRANSCRIPT- [redacted] Food Hub- Dolores

Summary Reference

gave them emergency bag because they were here. Absolutely. And you were speaking and know. Do you know this also says, oh, yeah, I've been there.

[00:35:38]  
Dolores : I read out the whole list of all the food hubs in [redacted] at which date, because they said not many are open on a Saturday. So I read out, because we have a list and I read out the whole list, and they knew each one of them and they knew exactly which day they were open. So they had been to all of them.

[00:35:54]  
Speaker A: Yeah.

[00:35:55]  
Dolores : And there were two on Saturday open.

[00:35:57]  
Speaker A: I think that is a challenge of the open.

[00:36:03]  
Charlie: Access 23, really. We're all looking at anyway, they had a bag and that was fine because you don't know. You don't know people's circumstances. And I think to me it's that whole balance between, it's not my right to know, but if we do know, we can help you better. We can support you better in terms of not us personally, but directing you to the places. You said when the income people came.

[00:36:40]  
Dolores : People wouldn't access them.

[00:36:42]  
Betty : There's a team called the income maximization team for [redacted] district council. And basically their main aim is to make sure nobody ends up getting chucked out of their house. But they came and did sessions here and they stopped coming because people wouldn't engage with them and what they weren't, they were expecting to chat to people, explain what they did and get people to book follow on appointments where they could basically do their stuff with them and [redacted].

CODE STRIPES

- Isolation
- Resilience
- othering
- Skills - Procedural Knowledge
- Belonging
- INTERVENTIONS
- FOOD LITERACY
- Culture
- FOOD INSECURITY
- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS
- Gratitude