

Orientación familiar en educación nutricional a educandos con discapacidad intelectual

Family guidance on nutritional education for learners with intellectual disabilities

Lonis Pedro Delgado López**Yanet Simón Benzant¹****Cruz Aleida Sosa López¹**¹Universidad de Guantánamo. Cuba**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0668-4349><https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1909-7151><https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9339-2175>**Correos electrónicos:**

lonis@cug.co.cu

ysimon@cug.co.cu

casosa@cug.co.cu

Received: April 10, 2026

Revised: April 22, 2026

Accepted: May 15, 2026

RESUMEN: El presente artículo tiene como objetivo la elaboración de una estrategia educativa para la orientación familiar en la educación nutricional a educandos con discapacidad intelectual que propicie desarrollar hábitos y habilidades prácticas y comunicativas para brindar una atención y orientación nutricional en el hogar, contentiva de acciones por etapas apoyadas en la concepción del plan de soberanía alimentaria y nutricional y el Desarrollo Local a nivel municipal. Se aplicaron métodos como: la observación, encuestas, entrevistas que mostraron insuficiencias en las actitudes y prácticas nutricionales. Los resultados mostraron transformaciones en el modo de actuación percibido en la aplicación práctica.

Palabras clave: Educación nutricional; Orientación familiar; Discapacidad intelectual; Desarrollo local

ABSTRACT: This article aims to develop an educational strategy for family guidance regarding the nutritional education of students with intellectual disabilities. The strategy seeks to foster the development of practical and communicative habits and skills to facilitate nutritional care and guidance at home, comprising phased actions supported by the framework of the food and nutritional sovereignty plan and local development at the municipal level. Methods such as observation, surveys, and interviews were employed, revealing shortcomings in nutritional attitudes and practices. The results showed transformations in the mode of action perceived in the practical application.

Keywords: Nutritional education; Family guidance; Intellectual disability; Local development

Introduction

In recent years, a more robust political, economic, and social stance has emerged regarding the search for solutions to global phenomena that severely affect human beings- specifically malnutrition, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, obesity, and diet-related chronic diseases.

Studies indicate that over 900 million people suffer from malnutrition and approximately 170 million children are underweight; consequently, international institutions such as the Food and

Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2014–2020) and the World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) include nutritional education aimed at improving health and general well-being among their key objectives and goals.

In our country, these policies are put into practice by promoting appropriate dietary and nutritional regimens for all, taking into account individuals' physical and mental health status. In this context, nutritional education strategies serve as a cornerstone for raising awareness and providing guidance at the individual, family, community, and institutional levels to foster healthy eating habits, food safety, and the consumption of appropriate foods.

The commitment to the right to food is clearly reflected in the actions of the Cuban government and state, translating into improved well-being, health, and nutrition for the population. This is evident in development strategies and the implementation of specific actions tailored to groups at high risk of nutritional vulnerability, such as students with disabilities. Within this framework, the family is regarded as the primary source for adopting practices that promote appropriate dietary and nutritional regimens, while considering physical and mental health needs. Despite the implementation of policies, laws, and a Grassroots Nutritional Education Program disseminated through various channels and led primarily by the Ministry of Public Health and the Institute of Nutrition and Food Hygiene adequate nutritional habits are still lacking in a significant portion of the population. This is particularly true for families of students with intellectual disabilities a group considered vulnerable due to their diverse characteristics and the prevalence of misguided attitudes such as overprotection and poor dietary choices.

The findings of the aforementioned research are highly valuable, serving as the theoretical and methodological foundation for the current study. However, despite these existing efforts, there is a need to initiate a system of actions that strengthens the family's role in nutritional education. Consequently, the research problem is defined as follows: how can family guidance regarding nutritional education for students with intellectual disabilities be effectively designed and implemented?

Accordingly, the objective is to propose an educational strategy for family guidance on nutritional education for students with intellectual disabilities, aimed at fostering the development of practical and communicative habits and skills to facilitate nutritional care and guidance within the home.

Development

One of the global phenomena affecting modern society is the critical nutritional situation it faces; consequently, when the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were ratified in 2015, the definitive eradication of hunger and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030 was included as a specific target. Subsequently, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025). These events placed human nutrition at the forefront of attention, fostering global cooperation on food and nutrition security; this spurred initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean- such as the “Latin America and the Caribbean Without Hunger” initiative and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Plan for Food Security, Nutrition and Hunger Eradication- thereby highlighting the commitment of member countries.

This commitment is spearheaded by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which possesses extensive experience in food and nutrition education, designing and implementing programs for various nations, countries, communities, and households. Its mission “...is to raise levels of nutrition, improve agricultural productivity, better the lives of rural populations, and contribute to the growth of the world economy...” (FAO, 2014, p. 4). Both this institution and the World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledge and state in their programmatic frameworks that nutrition education is a key pathway to helping resolve or mitigate nutritional problems; its implementation fosters the prevention of diseases and abnormalities in human biopsychological functioning. It has been shown that food can cause illness when the requirements for its consumption such as proper preparation, hygiene measures, appropriate portioning, and knowledge of both the nutrients present in food and the body's specific needs- are unknown. Consequently, nutritional education has become a priority in both global and national policy agendas.

Major government and state programs and initiatives in Cuba incorporate a nutritional focus aimed at improving the diet of various population groups. Efforts are underway to expand access to food, strengthen healthcare systems, and combat malnutrition in all its forms, as well as address its impact on chronic non-communicable diseases.

Cuba’s recognition of nutrition as a primary determinant of health and a key indicator of personal well-being is enshrined in the Constitution, which states: “All persons have the right to healthy and adequate food. The State creates the conditions to strengthen food security for the entire

population” (Article 77). This commitment is further ratified in regulatory frameworks such as the Food Sovereignty and Nutritional Education Plan (Plan SAN) and its implementation through Law 148/2022 on Food Sovereignty and Food and Nutritional Security (Law SSAN) Consejo de Ministros de la República de Cuba (2020). These measures represent substantial steps toward developing and strengthening more resilient and sustainable local food systems, actively involving society in building and fostering a food culture and nutritional education that contribute to a healthy population. To achieve this goal, nutrition education serves as a driving force influencing the development of dietary habits including food preparation, safety, and the proper use of environmental conditions as well as balanced food consumption, dietary practices, and the modification of attitudes and behaviors that lead to nutritional deficiencies or excesses. In this context, the family is viewed as the natural and ideal setting for gradually and systematically fostering the knowledge and behaviors necessary for the nutritional education of learners.

When addressing this concept, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), and the FAO refer to it as “Food and Nutrition Education,” focusing on the relationship between food intake and nutrition. In Cuba, the terms “Food Sovereignty” and “Nutrition Education” are used; however, within the educational context, it is framed as “Food and Nutrition Education.” La educación nutricional ha sido investigada tanto internacional como nacionalmente por diferentes organizaciones y autores en este trabajo se asume la concepción de la FAO que plantea “la educación alimentaria y nutricional no contempla solo la difusión de información acerca de los alimentos y sus nutrientes, sino que también proporciona las herramientas para saber qué hacer y cómo actuar para mejorar la nutrición” (FAO, 2020, p. 1).

It further explains that these are:

Educational strategies designed to facilitate the voluntary adoption of dietary habits and other behaviors related to food and nutrition that are conducive to health and well-being. These strategies focus on developing individuals' skills to make appropriate dietary decisions and on promoting a supportive food environment. Nutrition education actions are carried out at the individual, community, and policy levels. (FAO, 2020, p. 1)

Strategies include group sessions, counseling, campaigns, educational school gardens, demonstrations, and partnerships with decision-making bodies (FAO, 2020).

This definition is adopted due to the importance it places on acquiring knowledge about foods and their nutrients, and because it emphasizes the need for guidance and the adoption of a conscious stance through methods and actions that enable the practice of making appropriate nutrient choices.

For this reason, the family is considered a driving force behind dietary habits; while there are numerous theoretical approaches regarding this aspect, this research draws upon the following:

López (2004) states that:

The family has always been the most suitable setting for nutrition education, given that, from birth, the individual shares meals with the rest of the family, and a relationship of closeness and affection exists among its members. However, the family has evolved significantly and currently shares this role with other educational systems in society. (p. 54)

There is also agreement with López that “the family should encourage positive attitudes toward foods specific to the individual's culture and follow dietary guideline recommendations while managing food aversions” (2004, p. 54). The authors share the ideas outlined above, regarding the family as a fundamental pillar in the acquisition of dietary habits- habits formed in the home and developed in conjunction with educational institutions. This aspect is addressed by the Cuban school system through the establishment of the Guiding Program for Health Promotion and Education, which strengthens the curricular approach to health education including nutrition education- by incorporating it as a cross-cutting theme across various educational levels and through guidance provided to families.

This nutrition education is grounded in the aforementioned document, which presents food and nutrition education as a content area with the following general objective:

To provide elements that substantiate the importance of food and nutrition education, based on the study of dietary guidelines for the Cuban population and measures to prevent diseases caused by malnutrition and improper food handling, while fostering a positive attitude toward the consumption of fruits, cereals, legumes, vegetables, and water as an essential dietary component. (Gómez *et al.*, 2015, p. 16)

The document guides the comprehensive educational work of institutions particularly regarding their interaction with students' families- and is further supported by the regulatory framework of the Law on Food Sovereignty and Nutrition Education. This law aims to achieve food sovereignty, strengthen food and nutritional sovereignty, and progressively guarantee the right to food in Cuba.

Supported by educational, community, economic, and social institutions, this legislation fosters a key strategy for strengthening the population's food sovereignty and nutritional security: Urban, Suburban, and Family Agriculture. This initiative promotes the cultivation of fresh, healthy produce and drives community work, public participation, and awareness regarding the importance of food production and responsible consumption, highlighting the nutritional value of the food produced.

These ideas translate into practical actions for fostering nutritional education among families of students with disabilities specifically intellectual disabilities, a condition that often co-occurs with other impairments. Consequently, nutritional education efforts must be more in-depth and individualized, given the specific challenges associated with high rates of obesity, underweight, and malnutrition; these factors classify the group as vulnerable and at high nutritional risk, thereby underscoring the need to strengthen family guidance.

Guided by the research objectives, a factual-causal diagnosis was conducted using both theoretical and empirical methods including historical-logical analysis, analysis and synthesis, document review, observation, surveys, and interviews. Processing these results enabled the team to make assessments and draw conclusions. The study was carried out in the municipality of San Antonio del Sur, Guantánamo province, with a population consisting of 10 families of students with intellectual disabilities.

The use of various instruments made it possible to identify existing shortcomings and strengths, as well as the potential causes hindering and factors that could accelerate or impact the implementation of the proposed strategy aimed at achieving the research goal.

Overall, the results indicate the persistence of erroneous beliefs, myths, and behaviors. There is a need to raise awareness regarding the various roles nutrition plays in different spheres of life including health, learning, and the production, distribution, and consumption of food. Furthermore, it is essential to foster healthy, fundamental concepts, attitudes, and behaviors regarding nutrition, particularly when addressing the health issues affecting students with intellectual disabilities.

Educational strategy for family guidance on nutritional education for students with intellectual disabilities

The strategy is grounded in the concept that “family education consists of a system of influence, pedagogically directed toward enhancing the preparedness of adult family members and

encouraging their conscious engagement in the upbringing of their children, in coordination with the school” Castro (2005).

The strategy is organized into four stages, featuring actions grounded in a comprehensive, multifactorial, and multidisciplinary educational vision. Practical cognitive activities are conceived as a didactic resource that integrates basic nutritional knowledge, practical strategies, and local cultural suggestions, all adapted to economic and social realities. Its objective is to help strengthen family guidance regarding nutritional education for learners with intellectual disabilities.

The strategy is philosophically grounded in dialectical materialism specifically its laws, principles, and categories. This framework allows for an understanding of the relationships between concepts of nutritional education, family guidance, and the need to address the health and well-being of learners with intellectual disabilities. The law of the negation of the negation helps us understand that disability formerly viewed as a condition that relegated individuals with limitations to the margins of society is now defined as a dynamic, evolving condition. It requires assessment across individual and general levels, considering the biological, psychological, and social essences that characterize it, in order to guide families in fostering healthy eating habits.

Sociology, as the science dedicated to studying social relationships among human beings, underpins the fundamental aspects of educating the individual as a social being and highlights the family's influence on their formation and development. It is essential to raise awareness regarding the importance of nutritional education as a vital bridge to achieving quality of life and general well-being, as well as its impact on cognitive development.

Psychological foundations within the strategy are shaped by the postulates of the socio-historical-cultural paradigm established by Vygotsky and his followers. These serve as a platform for nutritional education by recognizing the role that “others” (specifically the family) must play as mediators in the development of learners with intellectual disabilities. Through its awareness-raising and diagnostic stages, the strategy reveals the family's current capacity to facilitate nutritional education. This makes it possible to identify the potential and needs for elevating home-based knowledge and practices to a potential level of development.

General pedagogy embraces the principle that education has both collective and individual dimensions. This allows for the assessment of the specific individual characteristics of learners with intellectual disabilities and their social developmental context, thereby structuring guidance

for families regarding nutritional education. Furthermore, this approach enables the identification of the necessary cognitive and practical resources and support systems to guide the multifaceted actions required to foster effective family involvement in developing healthy eating habits.

The principle of an inclusive approach viewing the learner with an intellectual disability as an active participant in education and society and the principle of family guidance positioning the family as a key player in their children's education serve as effective foundations for research aimed at improving the quality of nutritional education.

Stage 1: Diagnosis. Techniques to characterize the state of nutritional education (design, implementation, and data processing). Motivational activities aimed at raising awareness about nutritional education.

In the first stage, efforts focused on characterizing the families' initial nutritional knowledge and dietary practices through surveys, interviews, and participant observation. This process identified erroneous behavioral patterns, myths, and beliefs, as well as high consumption of foods containing animal fats, skipped breakfasts, low intake of fruits and vegetables, and overprotective attitudes. Additionally, there was a lack of understanding regarding the link between nutrition and cognitive development; these findings provided the basis for structuring the content of subsequent actions.

Motivational workshops are promoted to highlight the importance of nutritional education in fostering the cognitive, emotional, and physical development of learners. Another activity should focus on discussing the characteristics of learners with intellectual disabilities. It is important that this activity be conducted solely among peers, without the presence of the learners with this diagnosis.

Stage 2: Design of preliminary coordination, planning, and organization of nutritional education. In the third stage, theoretical and practical activities were designed using an educational, multifactorial, and multidisciplinary approach that was visually appealing and suited to the community's economic and social conditions. The content was finalized, along with the professionals responsible for its delivery and the logistics regarding space, timing, and locations—such as arable land and home cooking settings. The content was organized into thematic areas: the importance of meal timing and appropriate schedules; how to prepare a healthy dish; common myths and errors regarding the diet and nutrition of students with intellectual disabilities; hydration and performance in the municipality's semi-arid eastern zone; the promotion of nutritional

protocols; and nutritious meal planning that respects culinary culture. It also covered the use of arable land in the community, at school, and at home for planting vegetables, greens, fruits, and short cycle crops, as well as their dietary consumption. Each thematic area included practical, family-oriented tips for the home alongside summarized scientific information tailored to the families' professional and cultural backgrounds.

Stage 3. Execution of cognitive activities and practical changes for nutritional education.

Work sessions were conducted through friendly, engaging conversations that facilitated content delivery, fostered high levels of motivation, and highlighted knowledge gaps and practical barriers to implementing nutritional habits at home. Examples of planting affordable, locally adapted crops were evaluated, and workshops were held to share local recipes and nutritional advice.

The reflection workshops were designed to address home practices, experiences, support, and discussion, creating a favorable environment to raise family awareness regarding the adoption of healthy eating habits. Consequently, some practical activities focused on realistic tasks such as cooking, food selection, and school gardens and debates and discussions regarding what constitutes a healthy diet and how to achieve it.

The activity is evaluated upon its conclusion- using surveys, open dialogue, or motivational techniques to gauge family satisfaction levels and gather suggestions for new topics or activities.

Stage 4: Evaluation of guided nutritional education sessions

This final stage allowed for the evaluation of the impact of the actions taken which fostered awareness and understanding regarding the need for nutritional education for students with intellectual disabilities and involved a review of the coordinated actions from each preceding stage. Improvements are proposed, and irregularities and strengths in the implementation of actions are assessed; verifiable indicators are coordinated, and feedback is gathered through surveys or community meetings with families.

Results show the acquisition of knowledge regarding home eating habits and their importance in boosting the students' cognitive, emotional, and physical development, thereby strengthening their academic performance and overall well-being.

Although the proposal is currently being implemented only in part, early results suggest a willingness to transform family eating habits, improve the cultivation of available growing spaces, and strengthen the bonds between the community, the educational institution, and families. It is

concluded that a practical, cognitive, and motivational strategy- involving active, multi-stakeholder participation from families and the wider community effectively promotes nutritional education.

Conclusions

Given that nutritional issues are among the many complications significantly affecting human life, food and nutrition education is essential for guiding families; it serves as a fundamental pillar in developing healthy eating habits and a dietary culture, while fostering an awareness of behaviors that lead to a better quality of life.

Acquiring knowledge and educational practices regarding nutrition is a prerequisite for families to educate, regulate, and manage eating behaviors. This highlights nutritional education as a key pathway to fostering a well-rounded personality manifested through the adoption of proper eating and nutritional habits that contribute to physical and mental well-being and, ultimately, to achieving good health for students with intellectual disabilities. The design and implementation of the proposed strategy foster the development of nutritional education with a multidisciplinary approach, grounded in programs derived from the Cuban educational system and in the legal frameworks establishing the implementation of the right to food for all people in a sustainable manner through local development.

Bibliographic references

Castro, P. L. (2005). *Familia y escuela*. Pueblo y Educación.

Consejo de Ministros de la República de Cuba. (2020). *Plan de Soberanía Alimentaria y Educación Nutricional en Cuba*.

Gómez, Y., López, A. B., Torres, M. A., Carvajal, C., García, I., Roca, A. A. & Mazón, Y. (2015). *La Promoción y Educación para la Salud como parte del perfeccionamiento del Sistema Nacional de Educación*. La Habana: MINED.

Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura (FAO). (2014). *Estrategia y visión de la labor de la FAO en materia de nutrición*. Roma: FAO.

Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura (FAO). (2020). *¿Qué es la educación alimentaria y nutricional?* Red de Información, Comunicación y Educación Alimentaria y Nutricional Para América Latina y El Caribe. <http://www.fao.org/red-icean/acerca-de-la-red-icean/que-es-la-educacion-alimentaria-y-nutricional/en/>

López, C. (2004). Educación nutricional de la población general y de riesgo. En *Nutrición y Metabolismo en Trastornos de la Conducta Alimentaria* (pp. 459-476). Glosa