

Abstract

Food is more than a source of nutrition. It also reflects culture, identity, family traditions, and community. For immigrant populations, traditional foods help preserve cultural heritage while adapting to life in a new country, making immigrant foodways an important consideration in nutrition education. As the United States becomes increasingly culturally diverse, nutrition professionals need to understand how immigrant foodways influence both dietary choices and health. This study uses qualitative content analysis to examine how immigrant foodways are represented in selected U.S. nutrition materials. The analysis suggested that the selected materials emphasize standardized dietary guidelines while providing limited explicit attention to immigrant food traditions, dietary acculturation, and ingredient accessibility. The textbooks generally avoid negative portrayals of cultural foods. However, rather than integrating cultural diversity throughout nutrition practice, the textbooks confine it to stand-alone chapters on cultural diversity or often treat culture as a background consideration. Overall, this study suggests that nutrition textbooks, related introductory materials, and corresponding course syllabi, could better integrate immigrant foodways throughout the curriculum, thereby better supporting culturally responsive counseling. Recognizing food as both a source of nutrition and an expression of culture can better prepare future nutrition professionals to provide dietary guidance that is both evidence-based and meaningful for diverse communities.

Culturally Responsive Nutrition Education:
Examining the Representation of Immigrant Foodways in U.S. Nutrition Materials

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Introduction FOOD IS MORE THAN NUTRITION Food → Identity → Family → Community → Heritage For immigrant communities, food traditions can preserve cultural identity while also changing after migration. IMMIGRANT FOODWAYS Traditions, practices, and meanings surrounding food that are maintained and adapted after migration. KNOWLEDGE GAP How well are immigrant foodways represented in the materials used to educate furture nutrition professionals? RESEARCH AIM Examine the inclusion and omission of immigrant foodways in U.S. nutrition education materials using qualitative content analysis.	Results STANDARDIZED FRAMEWORKS DOMINATED CULTURAL AWARENESS ≠ PRACTICAL APPLICATION IMMIGRANT FOODWAYS WERE RARELY EXPLICIT ✗ Maintaining traditions after migration ✗ Immigrant cuisine examples ✗ Dynamic immigrant foodways ~ Ingredient accessibility ~ Cultural identity + food KEY TAKEAWAY Materials avoided negative portrayals of cultural foods, but	Discussion FROM AWARENESS TO APPLICATION Current materials may teach students that culture matters, without consistently showing them how to apply culture in practice. WHAT COULD BE INTEGRATED THROUGHOUT NUTRITION EDUCATION? - Dietary adaptation - Ingredient access - Family & generational differences - Cultural identity - Practical counseling strategies Move from teaching ABOUT cultural foods to teaching WITH ~~cultural food traditions~~
	THE CENTRAL ISSUE FOOD More than nutrients IDENTITY Culture, family, community FOODWAYS Maintained + adapted NUTRITION EDUCATION More than nutrients	Conclusion FOOD IS BOTH NUTRITION AND CULTURE CULTURAL FOOD KNOWLEDGE SHOULD MOVE BEYOND A SINGLE CHAPTER. INTEGRATE IMMIGRANT FOODWAYS THROUGHOUT CURRICULUM Greater integration of immigrant foodways throughout nutrition education could help future nutrition professionals: ✓ Connect guidance to exsiting food practices ✓ Recognize the cultural meaning of food ✓ Consider access to familiar ingredients ✓ Provide more culturally responsive counseling NEXT STEP Expand research to additional textbooks and curricula and include student and educator perspectives.
Methods QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS - SELECT 4 nutrition textbooks - Selected introductory chapters/materials 3 nutrition course syllabi - REVIEW - Cultural diversity - Dietary guidelines - Cultural food practices - Immigrant adaptation - Cultural identity - Ingredient access - Dietary acculturation - CLASSIFY ✓ Included ~ Partially included ✗ Absent Patterns of inclusion and omission were identified across the selected materials.	IMMIGRANT FOODWAYS ARE DYNAMIC TRADITION → MIGRATION → ADAPTATION → MEANING Traditional foods Regional & religious practices Ingredient availability, convenience, family & generational change Food can change without losing its cultural significance	References [1] Parasecoli, Fabio. "Food, Identity, and Cultural Reproduction in Immigrant Communities." Social Research, vol. 81, no. 2, 2014, pp. 415–39. JSTOR. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26549625. [2] Demir, Selin. "Changing Food Habits and Cultural Identity in Migrant Populations." Journal of Anthropology Reports, vol. 8, 2025, article 217, https://www.walshmedicalmedia.com/open-access/changing-food-habits-and-cultural-identity-in-migrant-populations-134580.html. [3] McCabe, Carolyn F., Amelia O’Brien-Combs, and Olivia S. Anderson. "Cultural Competency Training and Evaluation Methods Across Dietetics Education: A Narrative Review." Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, vol. 120, no. 7, 2020, pp. 1198–1209. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32199863/. [4] Setiloane, Kelebogile Tsametse. "Beyond the Melting Pot and Salad Bowl Views of Cultural Diversity: Advancing Cultural Diversity Education of Nutrition Educators." Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, vol. 48, no. 9, 2016, pp. 664–668.e1. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2016.05.008. [5] Thornton, Hannah, Tiffany Melton, et al. "Evolving Beyond the World Foods Course: Creating Racially and Ethnically Inclusive Educational Spaces for Dietetics Students." Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, vol. 122, no. 10, 2022, pp. 1998–2000. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2021.06.302.