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The alimentary and nutritional education from a theoretical-methodological dimension sustained in the Cuban juridical classification

La educación alimentaria y nutricional desde una dimensión teórico-metodológica sustentada en el ordenamiento jurídico cubano

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RESUMEN

El presente artículo se centra en la educación alimentaria y nutricional. Una problemática actual y pertinente, todavía insuficientemente tratada en relación a sus fundamentos jurídicos previstos en la legislación vigente en Cuba. En ese sentido, el objetivo de este trabajo es revelar una dimensión teórico-metodológica de la educación alimentaria y nutricional sustentada en el ordenamiento jurídico cubano actual. Los criterios valorativos de los autores revelan un conjunto de definiciones normativas, principios generales, objetivos específicos, tareas sectoriales y relaciones esenciales, sustentadas en el ordenamiento jurídico cubano; que refuerzan la concepción de la educación alimentaria y nutricional, como proceso educativo de carácter interdisciplinario, asociado al mejoramiento de las prácticas alimentarias y la optimización de los estados nutricionales para el desarrollo sostenible del bienestar humano y la prevención de enfermedades y otros daños a la salud. La síntesis resultante del proceso de análisis y argumentación, representa una vía para la actualización del conocimiento y optimización del desempeño de promotores de salud, médicos de familia, nutriólogos, educadores y otros profesionales vinculados al tema, evidenciándose el cumplimiento del objetivo propuesto.

ABSTRACT

The present article is centered in the alimentary and nutritional education. A current and pertinent problem, still insufficiently tried in relation to their juridical foundations foreseen in the effective legislation in Cuba. In that sense, the objective of this work is to reveal a theoretical-methodological dimension of the alimentary and nutritional education sustained in the current Cuban juridical classification. The approaches valoratives of the authors reveal a group of normative definitions, general principles, specific objectives, sectoral tasks and essential relationships, sustained in the Cuban juridical classification; that they reinforce the conception of the alimentary and nutritional education, like educational process of interdisciplinary character, associated to the improvement of the alimentary practices and the optimization of the nutritional states for the sustainable development of the human well-being and the prevention of illnesses and other damages to the health. The resulting synthesis of the analysis process and argument, represent a road for the bring up to date of the knowledge and optimization of the acting of promoters of health, family doctors, nutriologist, educators and other professionals linked to the topic, being evidenced the execution of the proposed objective.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development promotes the achievement of several objectives linked to food and nutritional education. Its significance transcends the borders of a single nation to become part of global development strategies. Hence, the legislative movement oriented toward the enactment of legal provisions that reinforce its comprehensive management. ⁽¹⁻⁴⁾

Food and nutritional education within the legal system has a multimodal projection. In this sense, it can be treated as a fundamental right. The scientific literature reveals a considerable number of investigations that reinforce the conception of food and nutritional education as a human right. ^(3, 5, 6) Other studies focus on its regulatory scope and delve into its ordering function. ⁽¹⁾ The present work falls within this line, with the purpose of revealing the epistemological foundation of food and nutritional education in the Cuban legal system.

In this regard, the theoretical-methodological dimension of food and nutritional education grounded in the Cuban legal system is understood, in this work, as the system of knowledge provided for in current legislation, with the purpose of regulating essential elements of its comprehensive management. Its nature is interdisciplinary and its function is binding, as it establishes normative conceptual definitions, principles, procedures, essential relationships, and other elements of knowledge.

The review of previous studies in national and foreign scientific journals reveals that research results linked to the regulatory treatment of food and nutritional education in the Cuban legal system are not abundant. ^(1, 2, 4) Among the reasons explaining this behavior, in the authors' opinion, are the contextual nature of this type of research, which is confined to the legislative reality of a specific nation, and the fact that the special Cuban regulation on this matter was recently enacted. Indeed, it was in 2022 that the Law on Food Sovereignty and Food and Nutritional Security came into force. ⁽²⁾

The aforementioned legal instrument states in its third "Whereas" clause the need, which existed at that time, to issue a legal provision to overcome the "absence of a specific regulatory framework to achieve food sovereignty and safeguard food and nutritional security, as well as the right to healthy and adequate food for the population in Cuba, and which, at the same time, establishes a national education system regarding good food practices in order to prevent diseases." ⁽²⁾

These elements reinforce the authors' opinion on the relevance of

delving into theoretical-methodological aspects, linked to food and nutritional education, regulated in the Cuban legal system. All the more so when, at a global level, there is no consensus among scholars on certain conceptual points, such as the definition or scope of food and nutritional education as an interdisciplinary educational process. Its complex nature requires the integration of disciplines from the areas of pedagogical, legal, medical, communicational, agricultural sciences, among others. ⁽⁷⁻¹⁰⁾

These assessments reveal a level of applicability of the interdisciplinary, humanistic, active, and transformative approach (IHAT approach) in the comprehensive management of food and nutritional education. The IHAT approach implies an interdisciplinary and anthropocentric theoretical-methodological positioning that favors the prevention of diseases and other health damages. Furthermore, it considers as pillars the treatment of the real needs and capacities of individuals, families, and communities for introducing positive transformations and increasing individual responsibility in self-care and health self-management. ⁽¹¹⁾

In this sense, the theoretical-methodological positions resulting from this study can contribute to the updating of knowledge and optimization of the performance of health promoters, family physicians, nutritionists, educators, and other professionals linked to the subject. Since the evaluative criteria set forth here come from the creative synthesis of the authors' research and educational experience, the systematization of related studies, and the review of specific legal provisions on food and nutritional education.

The above assessments are indicative of the need to reconsider the issue of food and nutritional education from a legally grounded positioning. Hence, this article aims to reveal a theoretical-methodological dimension of food and nutritional education grounded in the current Cuban legal system.

As a first order of analysis, it is stated that the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, in its Articles 77 and 78, establishes that all people have the right to healthy and adequate food, to consume quality goods and services that are not harmful to their health, and to access accurate and truthful information about them. ⁽⁴⁾

For a comprehensive understanding of the constitutional text, it is necessary to consider, in the authors' opinion, at least two essential categories. Among them are food sovereignty and food and nutritional security. Foreign studies agree in pointing out that the former is distinguished as a national capacity resulting from a global

synergy, and the latter as the individual access of the citizen. (12-14)

Cuban special legislation defines food sovereignty as the nation's capacity to produce food sustainably and provide access to the entire population to a sufficient, diverse, balanced, nutritious, safe, and healthy diet, reducing dependence on external means and inputs with respect for cultural diversity and environmental responsibility. Meanwhile, food and nutritional security is understood in normative terms as the "physical and economic access that each person has, at all times, to sufficient, balanced, safe, and nutritious foods to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, in order to lead an active and healthy life." (2)

It should also be distinguished that "food includes solids, liquids, partially liquids, as well as drinking water." (2) Based on the research experience and the results of the legislative review, the authors of this article consider it pertinent to establish indicators to determine whether a food is healthy and adequate. In this sense, its safety, quality, nutritional component, quantity, balance, and cultural acceptance must be taken into account.

It is worth distinguishing here that food and nutritional education, according to its Cuban normative definition, must be understood as the "set of information, training, education, and social communication actions that are part of a learning process aimed at modifying or improving people's food practices, to optimize their nutritional status, health, and well-being"; (2) hence its direct relationship with the "responsible and voluntary adoption of behaviors related to the processes of production, selection, acquisition, preservation, preparation, and consumption of food, in correspondence with cultural traditions, individual needs, and the availability of resources in each place." (2)

It is worth highlighting then, that food and nutritional education goes beyond the scope of an information dissemination strategy, constituting an educational process. Likewise, it is convenient to highlight its pedagogical significance in directing training and professional development programs. Along with its transformative orientation in the promotion of good food practices that respond to nutritional needs; conditioned by certain variables such as age, sex, health status, physical activity, among others. (15-17)

The criteria resulting from the systematic validation of educational practice, according to the authors' experience, allow attributing a high significance to food and nutritional education, beyond the classroom. The development of activities that favor the participation

of schools, families, and the community are effective. For example, the creation of school gardens that link theory and practice, as well as the development of dietary guidelines to promote healthy diets, are potentially transformative actions.

In the authors' opinion, it is necessary to consider among the pillars of food and nutritional education a set of criteria based on good practices adjusted to the legislative requirements of the Cuban legal system, namely:

- 1- Comprehensiveness: food and nutritional education addresses food as a biological, social, and cultural phenomenon.
- 2- Cultural relevance: it recognizes and respects local food traditions.
- 3- Equity: it seeks to guarantee access to information and resources for all social groups.
- 4- Sustainability: it promotes food practices that respect the environment and natural resources.
- 5- Community participation: it involves families, schools, and communities in the educational process.
- 6- Scientific basis: it is grounded in updated and reliable scientific evidence.

An analysis of the purposes of food and nutritional education involves the recognition of its specific objectives provided for in the Cuban legal system, including:

- Promote the consumption of a diversity of nutritious, healthy, and safe foods;
- Foster and expand knowledge of the nutritional value of foods;
- Stimulate healthy behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes regarding food;
- Develop personal capacities and motivations to adopt healthy eating practices that contribute to the prevention of chronic non-communicable diseases;
- Promote local eating habits, based on the recovery of good food practices;
- Integrate physical exercise as an indispensable complement in food and nutritional education programs; and
- Favor food protection for people in vulnerable situations. ⁽²⁾

Regarding the comprehensive management of food and nutritional education, the leading role of the health system is recognized, which

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is responsible for leading, from a collaborative intersectoral projection, the development of activities oriented toward the individual, the family, and the community in general, with emphasis on achieving healthy patterns of production, marketing, and consumption of food, to contribute to the reduction of malnutrition, whether due to excess or deficiency, as well as to the prevention and control of chronic non-communicable diseases. ⁽²⁾

The intersectoral nature of food and nutritional education as a social process promotes an inclusive strategy that considers, in addition to the health sector, the participation of other sectors such as culture, education, social communication, and agriculture. ⁽¹⁸⁾ In this sense, the legal system establishes fundamental tasks that must be executed as appropriate, including:

- Form values to advance toward sustainable lifestyles, with emphasis on responsible consumption.
 - Integrate the agroecological and sustainability approach into the contents to be taught by the national education system.
 - Develop didactic materials and communicational and informational products on food sovereignty and food and nutritional education.
 - Design and implement training and professional development programs on healthy eating and food product safety aimed at local food system actors.
 - Design continuous and ongoing preparation in food and nutritional education for cadres, officials, managers, and teachers.
 - Contribute to social communication and training on regulatory provisions regarding food matters.
 - Foster, in the corresponding health spaces, exchange with the population on food and nutrition topics in different age groups.
- (2)

In conclusive terms, it is stated that food and nutritional education constitutes an educational process, associated with the improvement of food practices and the optimization of nutritional states for sustainable development, human well-being, and the prevention of diseases and other health damages. In the Cuban legal system, its contribution to the responsible and voluntary adoption of behaviors related to the processes of production, selection, acquisition, preservation, preparation, and consumption of food is highlighted, in correspondence with cultural traditions, individual needs, and the availability of resources in each territory.

The points of view and evaluative criteria set forth in this work reveal, through a set of normative definitions, general principles, specific

objectives, sectoral tasks, and essential relationships, a theoretical-methodological dimension of food and nutritional education grounded in the current Cuban legal system, which demonstrates the fulfillment of the proposed objective.

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